

SUICIDE BOMBINGS IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Introduction

In recent years, the phenomenon of suicide bombings has become a topic of particular importance to terrorism analysts, psychologists, government officials, and parts of the general public in various regions of the world. Following the horrendous wave of suicide attacks that shook the United States on September 11, 2001, attention to this rather understudied phenomenon is likely to increase.

Since the 1980s, when Lebanon became the stage for several spectacular suicide terrorist attacks, this *modus operandi* has spread to a host of other countries, including Sri Lanka, Turkey, India, Pakistan, and other places as inconspicuous as Panama and Tanzania. However, few countries are more familiar with this tactic and its devastating consequences than the state of Israel.

Between 1993 and mid-April 2002, at least 128 Palestinian suicide bombers have detonated themselves in the vicinity of Israeli civilians or soldiers.¹ Roughly half of these suicide attacks have occurred during the Second Intifada, which erupted in late September 2000.² Since this latest round of violence and until April 12, 2002, at least 188 Israelis were killed, and over 1,800 wounded in suicide attacks.³ By April 12, roughly 40% of the Israelis “killed by Palestinian violence and terrorism since September 2000” were killed in suicide terrorist attacks.⁴

¹ See Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, April 15, 2002, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/>

² See Amos Harel, “The 100th Suicide Bomber,” *Ha'aretz* (On-line Edition), October 10, 2001. The statistics reported in this article should be viewed in conjunction with the updated statistics of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/>

³ See Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, April 15, 2002. Additional statistics on Israeli victims are available at the websites of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), <http://www.idf.il/>, and the website of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories at <http://www.btselem.org/>

⁴ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In academic literature, the phenomenon of suicide bombings has not enjoyed large prominence to date,⁵ and only a handful of scholarly articles have been published on the subject at the time of this writing. Most studies on suicide terrorism concern themselves with particular aspects of suicide terrorism, such as religious, cultural, or psychological considerations of the phenomenon. Little efforts have been made thus far to devise an analytical framework for understanding the processes and factors that underlie the development of the suicide bomber and the execution of suicide bombing attacks. This paper is an attempt to fill this gap.

The analytical framework offered here is an attempt to provide an overall model for a better understanding of the underlying motivations of Palestinian suicide bombers on the one hand, and the process in which suicide bombings are executed on the other hand. The model assumes that such an attack is the result of a two-phase process. Broadly speaking, this model first traces the underlying motives that drive organizations and individuals to perpetrate acts of suicide terrorism. It then shows how, following the recruitment of the suicide candidate, organizations train and indoctrinate him or her into a suicide bomber.

While much of the data used in this paper is specific to Israel, the study may be helpful in explaining occurrences of suicide terrorism in other countries as well. It attempts to answer three central questions: (1) What instills individual Palestinians with a willingness to die, and which factors reinforce this mentality? (2) What motivates organizations such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Fatah, and PFLP to organize suicide bombing attacks, and what are their goals? (3) What methods do these organizations use to mold motivated Palestinians who are

⁵ This apparent gap is more than likely to be filled in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001. Nevertheless, at the time of this writing, the only book that deals exclusively with the phenomenon of suicide terrorism is a collection of proceedings of an International Conference on Suicide Terrorism that was sponsored by the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) in Herzliya, Israel, on February 20-21, 2000. The book is titled Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference (Herzliya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel: 2001).

willing to die into actual suicide bombers, and how do organizations help plan and execute acts of suicide terrorism?

The two major aims of this paper can therefore be summarized as follows: First, to offer a framework of analysis for understanding suicide terrorism as an individual and organizational phenomenon. Second, to apply this model to the case of suicide bombings by Palestinians during the Second Intifada.

The study is structured as follows. Following the Introduction, Part I of the paper will present this new framework of analysis in more detail. It will also provide a brief overview of the phenomenon of suicide terrorism, offering a working definition of what may be understood as an act of suicide terrorism. Another section of Part I will look at the traditional profile of the suicide bomber and will argue that the concept of profiling should be reassessed.

Part II will examine the set of motivations—religious, personal, nationalist, economic, sociological, and psychological—that likely play a role in generating and/or reinforcing the willingness to die of an individual Palestinian, which is the precondition for his selection as a ‘martyr’. The argument will be made that it is a combination of motives among this “pool of personal motivations” that leads to and reinforces the readiness of some Palestinians to die.

Part III of the study will focus on organizational aspects of Palestinian suicide terrorism, and consists of three sections. The first section will cover several concepts from organizational and group theory and argues their relevance to suicide terrorism. The next section will provide an overview over the four organizations that are responsible for the suicide bombings in the first eighteen months of the Second Intifada, from October 2000 until March 2002. The third section will first discuss tactical aspects of suicide terrorism, and will then take a closer look at several aspects for which organizations employing suicide terrorism are responsible: recruitment,

training, indoctrination, planning, and execution. The findings will then be summarized in a conclusion.

Part I: Framework of Analysis

Two-Phase Model of Suicide Bombings

In the academic literature to date, the phenomenon of suicide terrorism has not received the attention it deserves. Of the rare studies conducted on this *modus operandi*, few have emphasized the need to consider both individual aspects (i.e., what motivates the volunteer for the suicide mission) as well as organizational aspects (i.e., organizational goals, and methods of training and indoctrination) of suicide terrorism.⁶

The framework of analysis offered here assumes that suicide terrorism is both an individual and an organizational phenomenon; in fact, it will be assumed that both aspects are integral and necessary parts of the process in which suicide attacks are organized and executed, and hence should be included in any discussion on suicide terrorism. The Israeli-Palestinian case shows that an individual Palestinian who is motivated to become a suicide bomber lacks the resources, information, and probably the mental capacity needed to perpetrate such an act without the help of an organization. It is therefore not surprising that nearly all suicide bombings against Israeli targets are planned by a radical Palestinian organization.⁷ At the same time, it is

⁶ Not all terrorism analysts agree on the importance of individual aspects of suicide terrorism. For example, Prof. Ariel Merari, a leading scholar on suicide bombings from Tel Aviv University, refers to suicide terrorism as an “organizational phenomenon.” See lecture by Prof. Ariel Merari at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy on January 16, 2002, summarized in Assaf Moghadam, “Fletcher Hosts Ariel Merari, Israeli Expert on Suicide Terrorism,” *Fletcher Ledger*, February 4, 2002, available at <http://www.fletcherledger.com/archive/2002-02-04/020402-NfinalSuicideTerrorism.htm>

⁷ There are a few exceptions to this rule. In February 2001, for example, a 35-year old Palestinian bus driver overran and killed eight Israelis. In fact, in many suicide attacks for which no organization claimed responsibility, the

clear that under normal circumstances, organizations themselves do not supply the pool of ripe suicide bombers from among their own ranks, but rather recruit individuals who are ready to kill themselves while killing others. It should also be kept in mind that the sheer fact that organizational leaders rarely put their own lives (or those of their relatives) at risk suggests that a clear distinction needs to be drawn between individual motives on the one hand, and organizational goals and motives on the other.

With this key assumption in mind, the framework of analysis offered here focuses on two sets of motives: those of the Palestinian individual, and those relating to organizations.⁸ Motives from the individual realm may include, *inter alia*, such motives as the desire to reap expected benefits in the afterlife, or the urge to seek revenge for the death or injury of a close friend or family member. The second set, which defines those goals and motives that lead organizations to plan suicide attacks, includes political aims of and tactical considerations for the use of suicide bombings.

These two sets of motives converge at the recruitment stage, when organizations identify and mobilize individuals who have professed a willingness to die. At this stage, the two necessary conditions for suicide bombings merge: on the one hand, a willingness to kill that may stem from individuals or from the organizations; and, on the other hand, a willingness to die among the individual who has been recruited. It is at the recruitment stage when the first phase, what I will term the 'Motivational phase', ends, and where the second phase, the Institutional Phase, sets in.

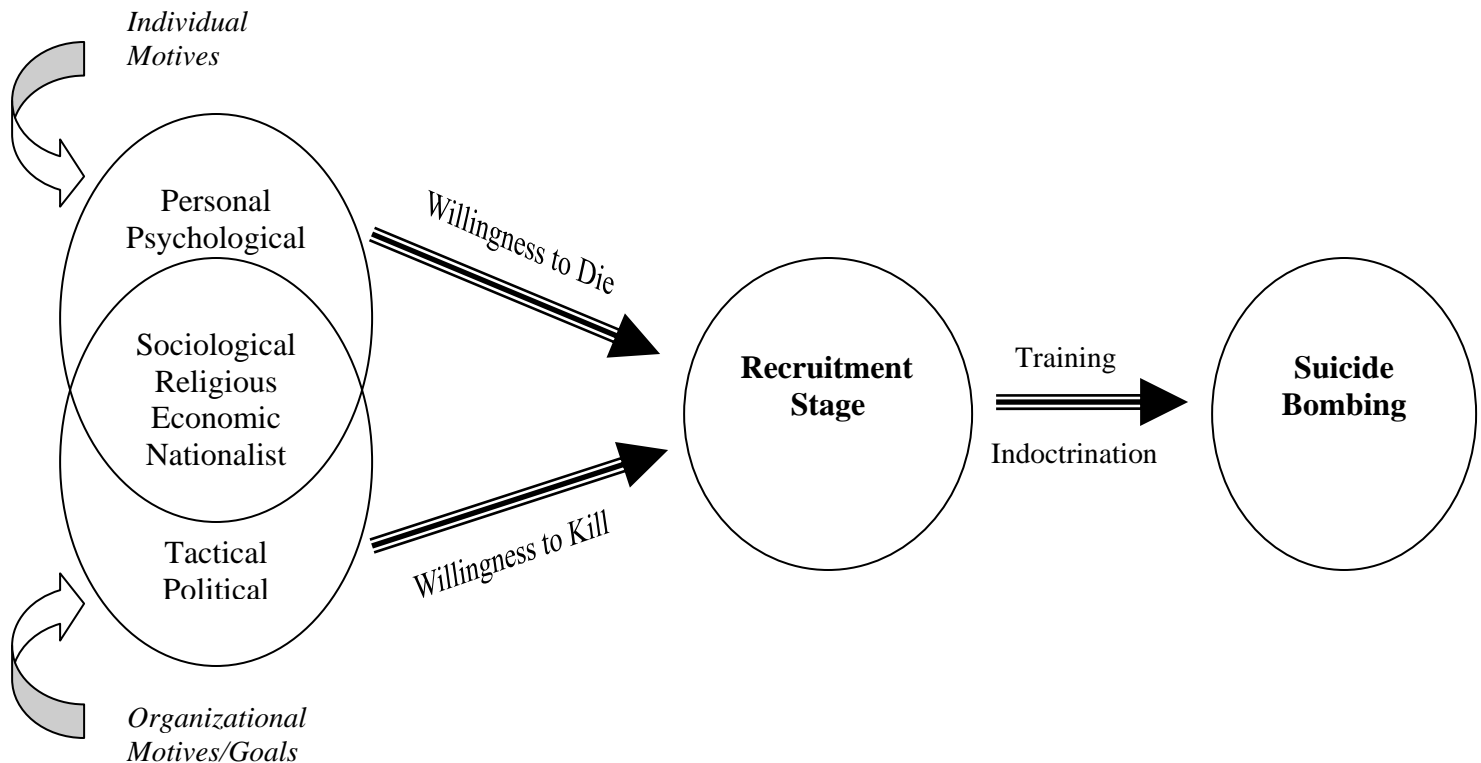
attacker wore no explosive device on his body. It appears that save for extremely rare cases, an ordinary individual would usually lack the resources and know-how to produce explosive devices on his own. In addition, some organizations may deliberately forego claiming responsibility for an attack due to tactical reasons, whether to deceive the enemy, as a means of psychological warfare, or to hamper retaliatory attacks.

⁸ It is assumed that some of these motives apply to both individuals and organizations.

TWO-PHASE MODEL OF SUICIDE BOMBINGS

MOTIVATIONAL PHASE

INSTITUTIONAL PHASE



During the 'Institutional Phase', the 'volunteer for martyrdom' comes entirely under the auspices of the organization. During this phase, the volunteer is indoctrinated and trained by the organization, which hones the individual who is ready to die into a highly committed 'living martyr'. The goal of the organization at this phase is to take all measures necessary to assure the individual's commitment to perpetrate the act—in fact, to morally bind the volunteer to his commitment and to make sure that he will not change his mind. To achieve this goal, the

organization, during this phase, will use several techniques that will include peptalks, group pressure, and the extrications of personal and public commitments that the candidate will find difficult, if not impossible, to turn back from.⁹ Towards the end of this phase, the ‘volunteer for martyrdom’ reaches a point of no return, and becomes a ‘living martyr’.¹⁰ This Institutional Phase, which usually stretches over a number of days, culminates in the execution of the actual suicide terrorism attack.

Terrorism and Suicide Bombings

The use of suicide attacks by terrorist groups is not a new phenomenon.¹¹ As Walter Laqueur points out, the medieval Assassins, most of the 19th century anarchist terrorist operations, and the Russian Social Revolutionaries all employed suicide missions. Laqueur argues that “virtually all attacks against leading public figures in countries that have capital punishment are suicide missions.”¹²

Though Laqueur’s point seems well taken, an assessment of what kind of attack constitutes a suicide mission is more problematic than might seem at first glance. What, for instance, distinguishes the mental state of a soldier who marches toward an enemy army in a hopeless battle from that of the suicide bomber whose death is all but certain? Is there any

⁹ Lecture by Ariel Merari at the Fletcher School, in Assaf Moghadam, “Fletcher Hosts Ariel Merari, Israeli Expert on Suicide Terrorism,” *Fletcher Ledger*, February 4, 2002, available at <http://www.fletcherledger.com/archive/2002-02-04/020402-NfinalSuicideTerrorism.htm>

¹⁰ See Assaf Moghadam, “Fletcher Hosts Ariel Merari, Israeli Expert on Suicide Terrorism.”

¹¹ The tactical use of suicide attacks has not been confined to terrorist groups, but has also been employed by state actors. Toward the end of World War Two, for example, Japan employed the notorious *kamikaze* suicide pilots, who downed their airplanes on U.S. targets.

¹² Laqueur, Walter (ed.), *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 141.

connection between the self-starvation of IRA prisoners, or between self-immolating Buddhist monks on the one hand, and the suicide bomber on the other?

The seeming lack of clarity with regard to defining an act of suicide terrorism has also occupied the Israeli defense establishment. As late as November 2001—over seven years after the first suicide attack on Israeli soil—the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Israel’s domestic intelligence services (known also by its Hebrew acronyms *Shabak* or *Shin Bet*) disagreed over how Palestinian suicide attacks should be counted. According to an Israeli news report, the *Shin Bet* abides by the traditional definition—that of an attacker who detonates a bomb strapped to his body—while the IDF has a broader understanding of the phenomenon. In its count, the IDF includes attacks in which the perpetrator stands virtually zero chance of survival. For this reason, a Palestinian gunman on a shooting spree inside Israeli cities would usually be considered a suicide bomber by the IDF, but not by the *Shin Bet*.¹³

In this paper, two elements shall define a suicide mission: the willingness to kill, combined with the willingness to die. As far as the goals of suicide missions are concerned, it cannot be generalized that a sponsoring organization such as Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) will deem a suicide bombing more successful the more casualties it produces.¹⁴ The ‘success’ of a suicide mission will depend on a number of factors that are often difficult to measure, such as the effect on the targeted population, or the extent to which the attack generates international condemnation, and hence political pressure on the sponsoring organizations.¹⁵ It will be a function of whether and how the Palestinian Authority (PA) will exert pressure against the sponsoring terrorist organizations, which in turn depends on political circumstances that are

¹³ Amos Harel, “IDF, Shin Bet Differ on Defining Suicide Attack,” *Ha’aretz* (On-Line Edition), November 30, 2001.

¹⁴ Author’s interview with Reuven Paz, Hertzliya, Israel, January 6, 2002.

¹⁵ In the Palestinian case, political pressure would initially be exerted on the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA may then decide to exert pressure on the organizations.

difficult to assess. Finally, it will depend also on the degree of media coverage the attack will elicit.

Any successful attack will necessarily result in the death of the suicide bomber during the detonation of the bombing device at or near the target. It is unlikely that from a tactical point of view, the group that planned the suicide bombing will consider a premature explosion (i.e., before the suicide bomber has reached his target) a success.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the suicide bomber will generally be considered a *shaheed* (martyr) regardless of whether his device detonated prematurely or not, or whether Israeli forces managed to stop him before inflicting severe damage on his target.

It is clear that the suicide bomber needs to be distinguished from an ordinary person who entertains suicidal tendencies. For the suicide bomber, it is not the determination to kill him or herself, but rather the determination to kill the enemy that is the driving force.¹⁷ Second, unlike in a normal suicide, the suicide terrorist plan is typically prepared by others, not by the individual himself.¹⁸ Third, unlike in an ordinary suicide, the suicide terrorist is ‘on call’ prior to the attack, oftentimes over a period of several weeks. One of the most extreme cases is that of September 11 suicide pilot Muhammad Atta, who seems to have known of the attack on the World Trade Center months, if not years, in advance—an attack that involved his own death. Psychologists

¹⁶ For other definitions of suicide terrorists, compare definitions by Boaz Ganor, “Suicide Attacks in Israel,” in International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference (Herzliya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel: 2001), p. 134, and Yoram Schweitzer, “Suicide Terrorism: Development and Main Characteristics,” ICT, Countering Suicide Terrorism, p. 76.

¹⁷ See Raphael Israeli, “Islamikaze and their Significance,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No.3 (Autumn 1997), p. 104.

¹⁸ See, for example, Ariel Merari, Statement Submitted in Testimony before the Special Oversight Panel on Terrorism, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, July 13, 2000. Additional information about the nature of the planning of the September 11, 2001 attacks will be necessary in order to establish whether the suicide terrorists of those attacks may have posed an exception to this rule.

and terrorism experts are likely to focus on Atta's considerable mental capabilities for many years to come, and may find it necessary to adjust the traditional profile of the suicide bomber.

Profiling the Suicide Bomber

The 'Traditional' Profile

Ongoing attempts by Israeli psychologists and terrorism experts to map the profile of suicide bombers have garnered only mixed results. In fact, several terrorism experts discount the existence of one single profile, and speak instead of a variety of profiles.¹⁹ Ariel Merari, an Israeli psychologist at Tel Aviv University, profiled a large number of suicide bombers serving in radical Arab or Islamic groups, and concluded that "no single psychological or demographic profile of suicide terrorists" exists.²⁰ Nevertheless, a large number of Palestinian suicide bombers from earlier waves of suicide bombings in Israel in the years between 1994 and 1997, as well as from the first eighteen months of the Second Intifada, turned out to have been in their early twenties, single, unemployed, and from lower socio-economic strata. They had usually completed high school, and had sometimes enrolled in college. The average age of the Palestinian suicide bomber in late August 2001 was twenty-one, and the tendency was for their average age to fall.²¹ Many suicide bombers were deeply pious, devoted students in religious centers funded by Islamist groups such as Hamas or PIJ. It is also a fact that some friends and family members of individual perpetrators had been killed or injured while fighting Israeli security forces, as has been revealed either by the suicide bombers themselves (for example,

¹⁹ Author's interviews with Anat Kurz, Tel Aviv, Israel, January 7, 2002, and Yoram Schweitzer, Hertzliya, January 8, 2002.

²⁰ See Ehud Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2000, p. 68.

²¹ See "Profile of a Suicide Bomber: Single Male, Average Age – 21", *Ha'aretz* (On-Line Edition), August 24, 2001.

through letters or videotapes left behind) or by their relatives and friends. These suicide bombers, it seemed, were raised in an atmosphere of conflict.

Reappraising the Profile of the Suicide Bomber

Events since 2001 have rendered the already problematic effort of profiling the Palestinian suicide bomber even less clear-cut, and these problems are also apparent with regard to establishing a general profile of all suicide terrorists.

In February 2001, a 35-year old Palestinian bus driver mowed down Israeli pedestrians, killing seven soldiers and a woman. Oddly, he was employed at Israel's main bus company, and enjoyed a regular salary. To add to the confusion of analysts, he seemed to have acted of his own accord, and was, unlike most suicide bombers, not recruited by cells of Hamas, PIJ, or Fatah.

Another exception was Izzedine al-Mazri, who killed 16 people at a Sbarro pizzeria at a busy intersection in central Jerusalem on August 9, 2001. Al-Mazri was the son of a wealthy businessman.²²

On September 9, 2001, 48 year-old Muhammad Shaker Habeishi detonated a bomb at the train station in the northern Israeli town of Nahariya, killing himself and three other Israelis. Habeishi had run for mayor in the Galilee village of Abu Sinan about a year before the attack. A father of eight, he became the first Arab Israeli to commit an act of suicide terrorism.²³

On December 5, 2001, Daoud Abu Sway died in a busy intersection in central Jerusalem, in what seemed to be a premature explosion of a device strapped to his body. Like Habeishi,

²² See Rebecca Trounson and Tracy Wilkinson, "After the Attack," *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 2001, p. A15.

²³ See Matthew Guttman, "The Bomber Next Door," *Jerusalem Post*, September 14, 2001, p. 5B.

Sway was a father of eight, and like Habeishi, Sway's age—he was forty-six—was more than double the average age of the 'typical' Palestinian suicide bomber.²⁴

The suicide attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, have further added to the confusion. Muhammad Atta, the suicide pilot of the first aircraft that hit the World Trade Center, was a 33-year old student at the Technical University in Hamburg, Germany. A seemingly intelligent and educated man, he did not appear to his peers as a victimized man who felt he had little to lose. Instead, he studied abroad and seemed to blend into German society relatively well. In the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, a former professor described him as “pious... yet not fanatical”, a “critical spirit...who even argued in favor of religious coexistence.”²⁵ Some of Atta's fellow suicide hijackers came from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, two of the most affluent Arab countries. The hijackers' origination from these oil-rich monarchies contradicts the traditional belief that suicide bombers are raised in an atmosphere of perpetual conflict or in poverty, and hence that their decision is an act of despair.

The current intifada has generated another novelty that merits a reassessment of the traditional profile of the suicide terrorist, namely the willingness of women to become *shuhadas*, female martyrs, as they are referred to among many in the Middle East. In August 2001, a Palestinian woman subsequently classified as a suicide bomber was caught while attempting to carry a bomb into Tel Aviv's central bus station.²⁶ On January 27, 2002, 27-year old Wafa Idris,

²⁴ See Joel Greenberg, “A Family is Left ‘Sad and Happy’ by a Violent Death,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2001, p. A13.

²⁵ Ingo Butters, Cordula Meyer, and Caroline Schmidt, “Das Nest der Schläfer,” *Der Spiegel* (Internet Edition), September 14, 2001, available online at <<http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/0,1518,157489,00.html>>

²⁶ Douglas Davis, “Report: Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers in Training,” *Jerusalem Post Online News*, August 6, 2001.

a Fatah activist from the al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah, carried a bomb that detonated in central Jerusalem, killing an 81-year old Israeli and injuring over a hundred more.²⁷

By early April 2002, a total of three female suicide bombers have wreaked considerable havoc in Israeli population centers (see Figs. I, Ia). All three female suicide bombers were members of Fatah—a testament to the group’s secular, inclusive outlook.

Female suicide bombers play an important role in many organizations that employ suicide bombings, oftentimes out of a desire to seek equality and to prove that they can be just as courageous as men. In Sri Lanka, over one-third of the suicide bombers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are women. In the PKK’s use of suicide bombings against Turkey, women carried out eleven out of fifteen successful attacks.²⁸ In the traditional Middle East, there is a precedent for the use of female suicide bombers. On March 10, 1985, 18-year old Sumayah Sa’ad drove a car loaded with dynamite into an Israeli military position in Southern Lebanon, killing twelve Israeli soldiers and wounding fourteen others. Roughly two weeks later, on March 25, 17-year old San’ah Muheidli drove a TNT-laden car into an IDF convoy, killing two soldiers and wounding two more. The two women were posthumously awarded the honoring title of “Brides of Blood” (*Arous ad-Damm*).²⁹

Given these novelties as witnessed during the suicide attacks against Israelis during the Second Intifada, a fundamental reappraisal of the profile of the Palestinian suicide bomber seems inevitable. The fact that Palestinian suicide bombers now seem to arise from a variety of social

²⁷ On February 9, 2002, the *New York Times* reported that an Israeli government investigation concluded that Wafa Idris was in fact a suicide bomber. The investigation had been ordered since circumstances surrounding the attack were initially unclear, especially the question of whether Ms. Idris had attempted to plant a bomb and escape, or whether she had intended to die in the attack. See James Bennet, Israelis Declare Arab Woman was in Fact a Suicide Bomber, *New York Times*, February 9, 2002 (Internet Edition).

²⁸ See Yoram Schweitzer, “Suicide Terrorism: Development and Main Characteristics,” in ICT, Countering Suicide Terrorism, pp. 82-83.

²⁹ See Amir Taheri, Holy Terror: Inside the World of Islamic Terrorism (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1987), pp. 126-129.

and economic backgrounds, may include women, and often differ significantly in age, strengthens the argument that the background of the suicide bomber is too multi-faceted to justify the categorization into a single profile. Moreover, available reports about the background of the suicide hijackers of September 11, combined with the above-mentioned deviations from the traditional profile of the Palestinian suicide bomber, suggest that there may also be a need to reassess the merits of establishing a universal profile of the suicide bomber. Some experts make a strong case in arguing that one single profile of suicide bombers, or of Palestinian suicide bombers, may no longer exist.³⁰

Of course, the difficulties in establishing a profile of the Palestinian suicide bomber do not preclude the suspicion that individual suicide bombers are driven by a specific combination among an identifiable set of religious, personal, national, economic, sociological, and psychological motives. Hence, the exact combination of motivations differs from suicide bomber to suicide bomber. The following discussion highlights those motives that together form a ‘pool of possible motivations’. This pool then contains the specific set of combinations of motives that may contribute to an individual Palestinian’s willingness to die.

Part II: The Motivations of the Suicide Bomber

Religious Motives

Given the complexity of the nature of motivations, it seems fair to question the chance of arriving at a full understanding of what motivates a person to detonate himself among a crowd of innocent people. An effort at sketching those underlying motivating factors that may lead to a person’s willingness to die, however, is as useful as it is important.

³⁰ Author’s interview with Yoram Schweitzer, Hertzliya, Israel, January 8, 2002.

It is doubtful that religious explanations alone will generate a person's willingness to die. Similarly, it is doubtful whether other motivations alone—nationalist, economic, or personal—will be able to explain the phenomenon. If religious motivations by themselves would explain the phenomenon of suicide terrorism, then acts of suicide terrorism would have to occur in all places where religious fundamentalism is a powerful force. If economic motives alone would explain the phenomenon, then suicide terrorism as a tactic would be used in other places where economic despair persists.

Since suicide terrorism does not occur in all places where the economic state is in shatters (say, in many parts of Africa), or where religious fundamentalism controls the political agenda (say, in Iran), it will be argued that it will ordinarily require a combination of some of the motives discussed in the following to convince ordinary people that the benefits of martyrdom outweigh the costs.

Within this gamut of intentions, religious motives seem to play a relatively important role. Hamas and PIJ spokespeople, for example, confirmed to Nasra Hassan, a Pakistani journalist who interviewed nearly 250 'volunteers for martyrdom', that all of them were deeply religious. She was also told that all volunteers for a suicide mission have to be convinced of the religious legitimacy of the act.³¹

When assessing Hassan's reports, however, the statements about the deep piety of the candidates deserve some qualification: First, as Islamist groups, Hamas and PIJ only recruit deeply pious individuals in the first place, and hence exclude secular Palestinians who might be equally ready to become *shaheeds*, or martyrs. Second, after 2002, most suicide attacks were

³¹ Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers: Talking to the 'Human Bombs'," *New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, p. 38.

organized by Fatah, a secular Palestinian group, whose members need not necessarily be religious (Fig. II).

To this day, Islamic scholars continue to debate whether suicide attacks against Israelis are legitimate. The religious among those who believe them to be a legitimate form of resistance, those who organize the attacks, and those who eventually carry them out, are usually associated with the radical Islamist branch of the Muslim tradition. Islamist groups and radical secular groups alike are consistent in using the terms *shaheed* (martyr) and *istishhad* (martyrdom) when referring to suicide attackers and suicide attacks, respectively, since ordinary suicide (*intihar*), i.e. suicide caused by personal distress, is expressly forbidden in Islam.

The Islamist Interpretation of Jihad

One Islamic tenet that has been the subject of much interpretation is the notion of *Jihad*, which carries two fundamental meanings that refer to the two fundamental struggles of the Muslim. *Jihad al nafs* is often described as “the struggle for one’s soul against one’s own base instinct”—an explanation that has been rejected by Islamists as heretical. *Jihad bi al saif* is the military struggle, the “holy war by means of the sword.”³²

According to Islamists, the military fight against the non-believers is the real ‘Greater Jihad’. To support their claims, they invoke only those Quranic sections that equate warfare with the duty of the faithful Muslim.

The Perception of the Enemy as an Infidel

Radical Islamists divide true believers on the one side, and infidels on the other, into two mutually exclusive camps known as the *Dar al-Iman*, the City of Faith, and the *Dar al-Harb*, the

³² Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, p. 130.

City of War.³³ The *Dar al-Iman* refers to those places where the rules of Islam are supreme and where Islamic laws are strictly obeyed. The *Dar al-Harb*, meanwhile, needs to be fought and cleansed of the infidels. The struggle against the *Dar al-Harb* is a holy one, and includes both domestic enemies of ‘true’ Islam—i.e., most Arab and Islamic leaders with the exception of the Iranian leadership—as well as external ones, first and foremost the United States and Israel.³⁴

Islamists in general perceive the ‘West,’ and in particular the United States, to be at the forefront of an anti-Islamic conspiracy that tries to undermine the religion, culture, and values of the Islamic world. As examples, they cite U.S. support for Israel, the continued U.S. military presence in the Middle East, or U.S. bombings of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Among the perceived sins of the United States, its support for Israel is second to none. The latter is perceived by many as an outpost of the West who has helped disseminate a godless, evil, and corrupt Western culture of secularism, capitalism, consumerism, and sexism, which poses a threat to the basic tenets of Islam.³⁵

The perceived threat to Islamic culture that emanates from the West and Israel leads the Islamist movement to claim that the Jihad is an act of self-defense against the ‘enemies of God’. Hence, suicide bombings and other violent acts are regarded a legitimate means of self-defense. In the words of the former spiritual leader of Hizballah, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, those who commit such activities “are not preachers of violence...Jihad in Islam is a defensive movement against those who impose violence.”³⁶

³³ See, for example, Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror*, p. 20.

³⁴ Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror*, p. 20.

³⁵ See, for example, Reuven Paz, “The Islamic Legitimacy of Suicide Terrorism,” pp. 92.

³⁶ Quoted in Laura Marlowe, “A Fiery Cleric’s Defense of Jihad,” *Time*, January 15, 1996. See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 97.

Another aspect of this Jihad is that despite his moral corruption, the enemy is perceived to be powerful and omnipresent³⁷—powerful because of his military superiority and technological advancement; and omnipresent because he is virtually everywhere and succeeds in spreading his negative influence. In fact, Islamists believe that the West has, since about the 1960s, successfully infected most regimes in the Middle East that one would describe today as secular and/or moderate. Secular Arab or moderate Muslim leaders thus belong to the same dangerous category of godless enemies that the ‘true’ Muslim must defeat.

Islam vs. Judaism

More radical Islamists—many of whom can be found in territories under Palestinian control—consider the conspiracy against Islam to be spearheaded by Israel and Judaism. The Israeli counter-terrorism expert Reuven Paz argues that “after the establishment of Israel and the renaissance of the Islamist groups since the 1960s and 1970s,” the perceived anti-Islamic conspiracy spearheaded by the West and Israel “came to be viewed as a constant and perhaps eternal struggle between Judaism and Islam.”³⁸ Indeed, Palestinian rhetoric during the Second Intifada has been as anti-Jewish as it has been anti-Israeli in character. Accordingly, verbal attacks by Palestinian leaders and the media have targeted the ‘Jews’, and not only Israelis per se. Moreover, Palestinian journalists often play down the Holocaust, or even accuse the Jews of having invented it. Others deny the significance, and often the existence, of the ancient Jewish temples and call biblical stories a fabrication.

The effect has been a drastic rhetorical escalation in the course of the Second Intifada, which often results in calls to murder Jews. On August 3, 2001, for instance, Sheikh Ibrahim Madhi held a Friday sermon at the Sheikh Ijlin Mosque in Gaza, where he said that “[t]he Koran

³⁷ See Reuven Paz, “The Islamic Legitimacy of Suicide Terrorism,” p. 92.

³⁸ Reuven Paz, “The Islamic Legitimacy of Suicide Terrorism,” p. 91.

is very clear on this: The greatest enemies of the Islamic nation are the Jews, may Allah fight them... The people who are the most hostile toward the believers are the Jews and the Polytheists.... Nothing will deter them except for us voluntarily detonating ourselves in their midst.”³⁹

Participation in the Jihad

In the sense that the Israeli-Palestinian struggle is perceived to be, at least partly, a struggle between Islam and Judaism, the participation in the struggle against Israel and the Jews as the embodiment of the ‘unislamic’ may well serve as a motive for potential *shaheeds*.

As discussed, such a struggle is often seen as a war of self-defense, one that has been imposed on the Muslims and that justifies even the most vicious form of violence. At closer look, the notion of self-defense expands beyond the reference to the military struggle. Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, and Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantisi, a co-founder and top official of the movement, for example, both expanded the notion of self-defense to include in it the protection of one’s dignity, pride, and well-being.⁴⁰ Rantisi’s statement also shows how religious motivations are sometimes difficult to distinguish from personal motivations such as the sensation of humiliation.

Glorifying Death and Seeking Martyrdom

Martyrdom has a long tradition in Islam, not only since the Ayatollah Khomeini declared no command “more binding to the Muslim than the command to sacrifice life and property to defend and bolster Islam.”⁴¹ *Istishhad* is often associated more closely with the Shi’ite tradition,

³⁹ “Friday Sermon on PA TV: Blessings to Whoever Saved a Bullet to Stick it in a Jew’s Head,” *Special Dispatch No. 252*, Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), August 7, 2001, available at <<http://www.memri.org/>>

⁴⁰ See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 80.

⁴¹ Quoted in Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 153.

where the accepted view is that Hussein, the third Imam, was chosen by Allah to become a martyr when he entered the fateful battle of Karbala. Until today, Shi'ite tradition holds that the martyr wears the *bassamat al-farah*, the smile of joy, at the time that he accomplishes his duty.⁴²

Since the first suicide bombing by an Islamist Palestinian group in the West Bank on April 16, 1993, and especially since the beginning of the Second Intifada in late September 2000, more and more Palestinians have expressed their wish and willingness to become martyrs by perpetrating 'martyrdom operations' against Israelis.⁴³ Interviewed by Nasra Hassan, one leader of the Al-Qassam Brigades, the military arm of Hamas, said that "it is easy for us to sweep the streets for boys who want to do a martyrdom operation. Fending off the crowds who demand revenge and retaliation and insisting on a human bomb operation—that becomes our biggest problem."⁴⁴

Juxtaposing Western Cowardice with Muslim Courage

During the Second Intifada, the mufti of Jerusalem, Ikrama Sabri, was quoted saying that "The Muslim embraces death...Look at the society of the Israelis. It is a selfish society that loves life. These are not people who are eager to die for their country and their God. The Jews will leave this land rather than die, but the Muslim is happy to die."⁴⁵

The mufti repeated a widely felt belief that people in the West, including Israelis/Jews, fear death. Islamists juxtapose this perception of the death-fearing infidel with the preparedness to die that is said to prevail among the true Muslim. Statements like that of the mufti are highly

⁴² On the *bassamat al-farah*, see for example Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror*, p. 134, Harvey Kushner, "Suicide Bombers: Business as Usual," p. 331, and Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, p. 100. See also Alan Philps, "Happy Man with a Bomb Strapped to his Waist," *Daily Telegraph*, August 16, 2001, p. 11.

⁴³ See, for example, "Hundreds of Men, Women, Volunteer for 'Martyrdom Operations'," *Palestinian Information Center*, May 19, 2001, FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20010519000045, "An Estimated 1,000 Martyrdom Bombers said Willing to Join Hamas' Military Wing," *Al-Majd*, August 20, 2001, FBIS-NES, GMP20010822000212.

⁴⁴ Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," p. 39.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Martyr Strategy," p. 36.

prolific in Gaza and the West Bank, and are connected to the belief that the West, including the Israelis/Jews are—despite their military strength—morally corrupt, seeking the pleasures of the good life, “protect[ing] their lives like a miser protects his money,”⁴⁶ and hence cowards.

Such a mode of thinking could urge the *shaheed* into proving to the hedonist that unlike him, the *shaheed* is not afraid to lose his life. In the words of Reuven Paz, the members of the Islamist groups must show the enemy “that they are truly brave, because the ultimate bravery and heroism lie in seeking out death, thus showing the enemy as cowards and themselves as heroes.”⁴⁷

Personal Motives

While religion seems to play an important role for many suicide bombers, there is no reason to assume that the *shaheed*'s decision to embark on a 'martyrdom operation' is entirely selfless.

The Benefits in the Afterlife

The messenger of God said “A martyr has six privileges with God. He is forgiven his sins on the shedding of the first drop of his blood; he is shown his place in paradise; he is redeemed from the torments of the grave; he is made secure from the fear of hell and a crown of glory is placed on his head of which one ruby is worth more than the world and all that is in it; he will marry seventy-two of the huris with black eyes; and his intercession will be accepted for seventy of his kinsmen.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ “Egyptian Government Daily on the Muslims’ Love of Death and Their Enemies’ Love of Life,” *Special Dispatch No. 289, MEMRI*, October 19, 2001, available at <<http://www.memri.org/>>

⁴⁷ Reuven Paz, “The Islamic Legitimacy of Suicide Terrorism,” p. 93.

⁴⁸ David C. Rapoport, “Sacred Terror: A Contemporary Example from Islam,” in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), pp. 117-118.

While much of the literature that describes the characteristics in paradise has flourished in the aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, most original references to the benefits of the martyr in paradise can be found in hadiths that were collected following the prophet Muhammad's death.⁴⁹ It is therefore not surprising that the modern day suicide bombers are not among the first Muslim group to believe that their act of *istishhad* will be followed by an ascent to a glorious heaven, where they will also see the face of Allah.⁵⁰ The medieval Assassins, the descendents of the Ishmaili sect, were partly motivated by the belief that they would immediately pass the gates to heaven if they would die during battle.⁵¹ That belief continues to be held among some radical Islamists almost a millennium later. Asked how he felt when he was selected for a martyrdom operation, one *shaheed*, whose attempt to blow himself up on an Israeli bus failed, said that, "it's as if a very high, impenetrable wall separated you from Paradise or Hell... Allah has promised one or the other to his creatures. So, by pressing the detonator, you can immediately open the door to Paradise—it is the shortest path to heaven."⁵²

Clearly, paradise seems to offer the martyr pleasures and benefits that he can only dream of in real life. If the *shaheed*, therefore, is convinced that he will enjoy those after-life benefits—and there are signs that some Palestinians who want to volunteer for a 'martyrdom operation' do—then candidates for martyrdom are confronted with a powerful incentive to swap the little that they possess for the luxuries they are promised.

The Suicide Bomber's Elevated Status after Death

⁴⁹ Author's interview with Reuven Paz, January 6, 2002.

⁵⁰ Compare Boaz Ganor, "Suicide Attacks in Israel," in ICT, *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 138-139.

⁵¹ See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, p. 89.

⁵² Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," p. 36.

An additional incentive to the suicide bomber is provided by the elevation of his status after the suicide mission is completed—an elevation that is given significant impetus by a virtual cult of the suicide bomber among many Palestinians.

This rise in social status after the suicide bomber's death seems all the more appealing when considered that the Palestinian *shaheeds* are raised in a culture where honor and dignity are highly treasured, if not “in the nature of Islam,” as one senior Hamas official put it,⁵³ and where becoming a martyr is among the highest, if not *the* highest, honor.

The elevated stature of the *shaheed* among Palestinians finds many expressions, beginning with the circulation of posters and leaflets carrying his name and picture. These posters are then placed in public areas, including on school walls and mosques.⁵⁴ The sponsoring organization would normally distribute a videotape of the *shaheed*, in which he urges others to follow his example. Maybe most important, every attack is followed by a rally commemorating the suicide bomber, where the number of participants at times lies in the thousands.

It is not difficult to fathom that many a young Gazan is looking at the glorification of this martyred Palestinian hero with a mixture of admiration and jealousy, and would even hope to reach the same kind of transcendent fame himself. In fact, he or she might—and rightfully so—regard martyrdom as the only way, given the circumstances, to attain a similar status.

Benefits to the Suicide Bomber's Family

A suicide bomber's mission will provide his family with both tangible and intangible rewards. After the suicide attack, both the material and the social status of the *shaheed's* family improve significantly. The family usually receives a cash payment of between \$1,000 and

⁵³ See interview with Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi, in Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 187-188.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Lee Hockstader, “At Arab, Israeli Schools, Hatres is Common Bond,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 2001, p. A1.

several thousand dollars from Hamas, the PIJ, and sometimes from third parties, such as the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.⁵⁵

One journalist who visited the family of Ismail al-Masawabi, who killed himself and two Israeli sergeants on June 22, 2001 with a suicide device, described the material improvement of the family in the *New York Times Magazine*. The Al-Masawabis, who used to live in a squalid refugee camp prior to the bombing, now lived in an apartment that was “spacious by Gaza standards... Everything in it looked new—the appliances, rugs and stuffed furniture, the gaudy wall clocks, even the bracelet and rings Ismail’s mother was wearing.”⁵⁶

Revenge

An additional motivation to volunteer for a suicide mission may be for the *shaheed* to avenge the death or injury of a close friend or family member. Due to the tiny size of the area ravaged by decades of conflict, an extremely high population density, and high casualty and injury rates especially during the Second Intifada, hardly any Palestinian has remained untouched by the violence, and many Palestinians—as well as Israelis—personally know somebody who has been injured or killed during the conflict. As a result, calls for revenge have been highly common on both sides of the conflict.

On the Palestinian side, revenge is often called for during funeral processions of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces.⁵⁷ Although a recent Israeli assessment found that revenge

⁵⁵ See, for example, Roni Shaked, “\$10,000 per ‘Shahid’,” *Yediot Ahronot*, December 13, 2000, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/> In March 2002, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that some 46 families of Tulkarm received checks of \$25,000 for each martyr, and of \$10,000 for each Palestinian shot by Israeli troops, from Saddam Hussein. See “Witwenrente von Saddam?” SPIEGEL Online, March 26, 2002, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,189096,00.html>

⁵⁶ Joseph Lelyveld, All Suicide Bombers are Not Alike,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 28, 2001, p. 50.

⁵⁷ See, for example, “Hamas Military Wing Promises Suicide Operations to Avenge 11-Year Old Boy,” *London Quds Press*, FBIS-NES, GMP20010708000123.

alone is seldom a motive,⁵⁸ and although those who train the *shaheeds* insist that revenge alone is not acceptable before Allah as a reason for seeking martyrdom,⁵⁹ it is not hard to fathom that many, if not most, suicide bombers share a feeling of revenge. In addition, some suicide bombers have admitted that revenge was their primary motive: Nafez al-Nether, who detonated himself and several Israeli soldiers on July 9, 2001, said he wanted to avenge the blood of Palestinians killed by Israel. One of those Palestinians was Nafez' brother Fayez, who was killed during the first intifada in clashes that took place in the Jabalya refugee camp.⁶⁰

Dignity vs. Humiliation

There are numerous hints that a sense of humiliation, and the need to regain some pride with a dignified act, might also motivate a suicide bomber. There is no dearth of references to the humiliation felt by most Palestinians who continue to live under Israeli occupation, and how this feeling motivates them to commit an act of terrorism. *Al Majallah*, a London-based, Saudi-owned Arabic weekly conducted an interview with a so-called 'living martyr'—a volunteer for martyrdom who has been recruited and is currently undergoing training. The person, who identified himself as Ahmad, told the correspondent that "martyrdom is a duty and a right. There is no humiliation like that of living under the occupation. So imagine how it is if the occupier is the arrogant Zionist."⁶¹ In a similar statement, an Islamic Jihad operative told a reporter of the *Christian Science Monitor* that the Palestinians' "main objective is to satisfy God's will by undertaking Jihad." The other is to regain the Palestinians' "stolen land and dignity."⁶² Hamas

⁵⁸ "Profile of a Suicide Bomber: Single Male, Average Age 21," *Ha'aretz* (Online Edition), August 24, 2001.

⁵⁹ Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," p. 41.

⁶⁰ "Palestinian Suicide Bomber Dies in Gaza Blast," *Reuters*, July 9, 2001.

⁶¹ "Palestinian 'Suicide Bomber' Interviewed on Motives, Family Background," *Al Majallah*, August 19, 2001, in FBIS-NES, GMP20010822000152.

⁶² Cameron W. Barr, "A Suicide Bomber's World," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 14, 2001.

co-founder Abdul Aziz Rantisi agrees that dishonoring someone is the worst act that can be done, the only remedy being the regaining of one's dignity.⁶³

The Expectation of Sexual Benefits

Islamic scholars are in utter disagreement over whether Islamic texts refer to sexual pleasures awaiting the martyrs, and an extensive discussion of the subject is beyond the scope of this paper.⁶⁴ Ultimately, however, the question of whether Islamic texts promise sexual pleasures to the martyr is less important than establishing whether religious leaders and operatives of Islamist and other radical groups attempt to and are able to convince young Palestinians that they will indeed attain such benefits in the afterlife. Statements collected by the *Middle East Media Research Institute* (MEMRI), as well as other sources, clearly indicate that not only do some operatives and religious scholars promote this belief, but a large number of youth are persuaded of attaining future pleasures as a reward for martyrdom.⁶⁵

Sixteen year-old Bassam Khalifi, for instance, told Western journalists, "I know my life is poor compared to Europe and America, but I have something awaiting me that makes all my suffering worthwhile.... Most boys can't stop thinking about the virgins."⁶⁶

In an even more compelling example, the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* reported that one suicide bomber, Mahdi Abu Malek, whose attempt to commit an attack by means of a wagon was botched by the IDF, had wrapped toilet paper around his genitals. He evidently wanted to assure protection of his genitals for later use in the Garden of Eden.⁶⁷

⁶³ See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 187.

⁶⁴ For an extensive discussion on the subject, see Yotam Feldner, "'72 Black-Eyed Virgins: A Muslim Debate on the Rewards of Martyrs," *Inquiry and Analysis No. 74*, MEMRI, October 30, 2001, available at <http://www.memri.org/>

⁶⁵ Yotam Feldner, "'72 Black-Eyed Virgins," MEMRI.

⁶⁶ Jack Kelley, "The Secret World of Suicide Bombers," *USA Today*, June 26, 2001, p. 1A.

⁶⁷ Moshe Sunder, "The Lost Garden of Eden," *Ma'ariv* (Weekend Section), August 17, 2001, p. 28 (Hebrew).

The Palestinian press often prints death announcements of ‘martyrs’ in the form of wedding announcements, corroborating the suspicion that martyrs expect to marry the ‘huris’, the ‘black-eyed virgins’, soon after their martyrdom. One representative ‘wedding announcement’ read: “With great pride, the PIJ marries the member of its military wing... the martyr and hero Yasser Al-Adhami, to ‘the black-eyed’.”⁶⁸ Descriptions of suicide bombers’ deaths as ‘martyr’s weddings’ are common in Muslim tradition, and not confined to Palestinian suicide bombers. ‘Bride of Blood’ San’ah Muheidli, for example, who drove her yellow Mercedes into an Israeli military convoy in southern Lebanon on April 9, 1985, instructed her mother in a videotape to “be merry, to let your joy explode as if it were my wedding day.”⁶⁹

Nationalist Motives

Many Palestinian suicide bombers appear to flock to Hamas, PIJ, and Fatah for nationalist reasons. Videotapes of suicide bombers, as well as statements of volunteers, ‘living martyrs’, or families of suicide bombers clearly suggest that many Palestinians perceive a deep sense of injustice done to them by a ‘Zionist entity’ that deprived Palestinians of their land and continues to deny them a worthy existence on what they regard to be Palestinian soil.

Most suicide bombers express a willingness to avoid the repetition of the 1948 *nakba*, i.e. the ‘catastrophe’ of the creation of the State of Israel, and clearly express their readiness to “die in defense of their land.”⁷⁰ It should be kept in mind here that in the Middle Eastern tradition, the

⁶⁸ Yotam Feldner, “72 Black-Eyed Virgins: A Muslim Debate on the Rewards of Martyrs,” *Inquiry and Analysis* No. 74, MEMRI, October 30, 2001, available at <<http://www.memri.org/>>

⁶⁹ Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror*, p. 128.

⁷⁰ “Palestinian ‘Suicide Bomber’ Interviewed on Motives, Family Background,” *Al Majallah*, August 19, 2001, in FBIS-NES, GMP20010822000152.

notion of territory, including that of the ‘house’, has a very high significance. The house is where the family is based—a social unit whose members are treated with utmost respect, and whose dignity and honor need to be preserved at all costs. Considering that the house connects the victimized Palestinian resident to the territory he or she was deprived of, it becomes an imperative to defend what little is left against any continued infringement on the part of the Israeli enemy.

Statements by Palestinian political leaders reflect the centrality of Palestinian nationalism as a motive. Reacting to the suicide bombing in front of Tel Aviv’s Dolphinarium, top Hamas official Al-Rantisi told *Al-Jazeera TV* that Palestinians “will never approve of the occupation of [their] homeland. I frankly advise the Jews who were deceived and who were brought from Poland, America, and Europe, and settled in Palestine at the expense of an entire population some fifty-three years ago, to spare their blood and return to where they came from. This is the only solution that will provide them with security.”⁷¹

Doubtless, these nationalist motives are intimately linked to and strengthened by the overwhelming sense of humiliation Palestinians have experienced over the five decades of Israeli occupation. Unlike in the first Intifada, which erupted in December 1987, Palestinians today live under Palestinian Authority rule. Nevertheless, the continued lack of territorial contiguity, and the persistent division of clusters of autonomous Palestinian areas by Israeli roadblocks and army checkpoints, generate frustrations that are similar to those Palestinians felt over a decade ago. In their seminal account of the first intifada (1987-1993), Israeli journalists Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari described the expressed motives of some Palestinians who were detained by the IDF at the beginning of the first intifada. It is worthwhile recounting them here:

⁷¹ “Hamas Leader Al-Rantisi Reacts to Tel Aviv Explosion,” *Doha Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel Television*, June 1, 2001, FBIS-NES GMP20010601000214.

“All of them cited much the same motive: the feeling that they had suffered a grave personal injustice at the hands of their Jewish employers or colleagues. Each prisoner had his own story to tell, but the gist of their experiences was similar: at one time or another they had been subjected to verbal and even physical abuse, cheated out of their wages, set to work under inhuman conditions, and exposed to the sweep of the dragnet that followed every act of terrorism. All complained of the insult and humiliation repeatedly suffered at army roadblocks and checkpoints: the nasty tone in which they were addressed, the body searches accompanied by shoves and shouts, the derision they were forced to endure in front of family and friends.”⁷²

Apart from feelings of humiliation, an additional catalyst for the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation is what may be termed the ‘national Jihad’⁷³—a struggle that serves the purpose of strengthening a Palestinian national entity and identity. In this case, the gradual formation of a national heritage coincides with what many on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict perceive to be a cosmic struggle between good and evil. It appears that this very notion of a national Jihad, fought as part of a larger cosmic battle, is particularly conducive to extreme forms of violence as witnessed during the Second Intifada and before.

Fighting the national Jihad serves several other purposes, apart from dying for the sake of Palestine. It generates a sense of pride and belonging to a national group that fights a seemingly invincible enemy. It can be fulfilling in the sense that the Zionist enemy’s sense of invincibility

⁷² Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel’s Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 82-83.

⁷³ Author’s interview with Reuven Paz, Hertzliya, Israel, January 6, 2002.

is shattered, which in turn humiliates the enemy and provides the *shaheed* with a tremendous sense of achievement.

Suicide terrorism fulfills two tactical roles here. First, it is a highly effective tactic used in the asymmetric warfare against Israel, as will be described in more detail in Part III. Most Palestinians are certainly aware of these tactical advantages of suicide bombings, and to some it probably serves as a motive. Dr. Ramadan Shalah, Secretary General of the PIJ, put it as follows: “Our enemy possesses the most sophisticated weapons in the world and its army is trained to a very high standard... We have nothing with which to repel killing and thuggery against us except the weapon of martyrdom. It is easy and costs us only our lives...human bombs cannot be defeated, not even by nuclear bombs.”⁷⁴ Closely connected is the fact that suicide bombings are a form of psychological warfare. As such, they fuel the belief that the enemy can be worn down over time, weakening Israeli society, while strengthening the Palestinian nation. In the process, the Israeli society is being instilled with fear. As we shall see later, these tactical advantages are a major factor in the decision by organizations to employ suicide bombings. At the same time, it would be wrong to underestimate the appeal that these tactical and psychological characteristics of suicide bombings have on individuals. Some individuals may even be driven by these particular traits of suicide bombings. Following one suicide bombing, one 19-year old Palestinian laborer asked a journalist from the *Associated Press*, “Did you see how the Jews were crying on television? I want to become a martyr like that to scare the Jews, to send them to hell.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2000, p. 68.

⁷⁵ Donna Abu Nasr, “Suicide Bombers United in Deadly Goal,” *Ottawa Citizen*, January 30, 1995, p. A6.

Economic Motives

Living in economic distress can be an additional—though neither essential nor central—underlying motive in the formation of a willingness to die among many Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. In the occupied territories, the most pressing economic and demographic problems are population density, a low standard of living, a high rate of unemployment and, maybe worst, a lack of prospects for a better future.

Most of the economic predicaments in the Palestinian-controlled areas have existed for decades. They resulted from the post-1967 Israeli economic domination, which made any improvement in the Palestinian standard of living conditional upon some direct connection to the economy in Israel proper.⁷⁶ In addition, for most of the Israeli occupation, Palestinians have faced a stubborn and paralyzing Israeli bureaucracy. In the words of Schiff and Ya'ari, “the Palestinians found themselves completely at the mercy of the [Israeli] Civil Administration in every sphere of economic life. Each request for a permit, grant, or dispensation entailed an exhausting wrestle with a crabbed bureaucracy of mostly indifferent but sometimes hostile clerks and officials—a veritable juggernaut of 400 Jewish mandarins managing thousands of Arab minions bereft of all authority.”

Today, the Gaza Strip is home to roughly 1.2 million people—about half of whom are fourteen years or younger—all sharing an area that is slightly larger than twice the size of Washington, D.C.⁷⁷ In the early 1990s, unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza together was under 5%, but it jumped to over 20% by the mid-1990s. Since 1997 and until September 2000, the economic situation in the Palestinian areas has generally improved, partly due to Israeli policies aimed at reducing the impact of closures and other measures. As a result, GDP in 1998

⁷⁶ Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Intifada*, p. 91.

⁷⁷ CIA World Factbook, 2001, December 28, 2001, available at <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>>

and 1999 grew by 5% and 6%, respectively, until the last quarter of 2000, when the outbreak of the Second Intifada led to renewed Israeli closures and the disruption of labor and trade movement in and out of the Palestinian self-rule areas.⁷⁸

The Second Intifada has drastically worsened the economic plight of the over three million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. According to a report by the United Nations Special Commissioner on the Occupied Territories (UNSCO), unemployment rose to 25% one year after the beginning of the Second Intifada, while the underlying jobless rate in Gaza alone was as high as 50%.⁷⁹

The UNSCO report said that the cost of the Second Intifada to the Palestinian economy after one year lay at between \$2.4 and \$3.2 billion. At the same time, revenues of the PA plummeted by 57% in the first nine months alone. Real incomes decreased by an average 37%, resulting in 46% of Palestinians living below the poverty line—twice as many as prior to the Second Intifada.⁸⁰

Given these harsh economic realities prevalent in Gaza and the West Bank, some Palestinians may sense hopelessness and despair, and may prefer a better life in the hereafter to their miserable existence in refugee camps. Economic distress may also have the effect of driving Palestinians to seek revenge against those they hold responsible for the conditions they find themselves in. One elderly resident of the West Bank town of Jenin urged a journalist, “Look around and see how we live here. Then maybe you will understand why there are always

⁷⁸ CIA World Factbook, 2001, December 28, 2001, available at <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>>

⁷⁹ Harvey Morris, “Closures in West Bank and Gaza ‘Hurting Israel’, UNSCO Report,” *Financial Times*, December 21, 2001, p. 8.

⁸⁰ Harvey Morris, “Closures in West Bank and Gaza ‘Hurting Israel’, UNSCO Report,” *Financial Times*, December 21, 2001, p. 8.

volunteers for martyrdom. Every good Muslim understands that it's better to die fighting than live without hope."⁸¹

Whatever ultimately contributes to a person's growing willingness to die, it should be clear that economic depravity in and of itself is an insufficient explanation as to the emergence of a widespread willingness to die among large parts of a population, and hence to the phenomenon of suicide bombings. The phenomenon of suicide bombings is completely absent in many other areas where economic difficulties persist. These areas include Arab countries such as Syria and Lebanon that house Palestinian refugee camps that are, at best, as squalid as those in the West Bank and Gaza. As has also been seen, some of the suicide bombers have come from relatively well-off families. Hence, it seems that economic motives for the evolution of a willingness to die must interact with other motives in order to result in the use of suicide bombings by a particular group. Economic distress may well have a higher potential to result in such drastic tactics as suicide bombings where it coincides with an ideology that seems to justify the use of all means against a demonized enemy. That distress is even more likely to result in suicide bombings where it is joined by a general sense of humiliation and felt frustration, and where these emotions are regarded as a threat to one's dignity, honor, and respectability. Hence, economic stress as a contributing factor to pre-existing motives is highly context-driven, and can play an important role in escalating a situation that is already conducive to violence.

⁸¹ Philip Jacobson, "Home-grown Martyrs of the West Bank Reap Deadly Harvest," *Sunday Telegraph*, August 19, 2001, p. 20.

Sociological and Psychological Aspects of Suicide Bombings

Sociological and psychological aspects of terrorism and violence may help shed further light on the phenomenon of suicide terrorism in general, and among Palestinians in particular. It will become clear in the following that some of these aspects—such as peer pressure—have the capacity to increase an individual’s willingness to die. Other aspects, however, may only serve to better describe the environment from which the suicide bombers thrive, although these may not constitute motives as such.

Mark Juergensmeyer points out that as in many other societies, young Palestinians between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two are in a “liminal state between two life stages,” where they are neither children in their parents’ families, nor have they created their own families. This situation can become a problem especially in societies that are built around family units. In such circumstances, religious movements may help fill the vacuum that the youth faces, and they often provide a home and an extended kinship. This situation renders the youth “vulnerable to the voices of powerful leaders and images of glory...”⁸²

Another obvious social phenomenon is the support that the ‘volunteers for martyrdom’ receive among the Palestinian population. In the summer of 2001, popular support for suicide bombings among Palestinians reached an all-time high, with over seventy percent of Palestinians expressing their support for such attacks, according to a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center

⁸² See Mark Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God, p. 191.

for Public Opinion.⁸³ Towards the end of that year, support for suicide bombings dropped somewhat, but still lay over sixty percent.⁸⁴

In fact, ‘martyrdom operations’ have long reached the status of a pop culture in Gaza and the West Bank. An-Najah University in Nablus, for example, marked the first anniversary of the beginning of the Second Intifada by sponsoring an exhibition on ‘martyrdom operations’ that featured reenactments of suicide bombings.⁸⁵ In the streets of Gaza, young kids are known to play a game called *shuhada*, which even includes a mock funeral,⁸⁶ and teenage rock groups sing songs praising the latest martyrdom operation.⁸⁷ Asked to name their heroes, young Palestinians often mention *shaheeds* such as Saeed Hutari, who detonated a device strapped to himself while standing among a crowd of young Israelis at the Dolphinarium nightclub on the Tel Aviv beachfront on June 1, 2001.⁸⁸

There have been reports about parents who proudly supported their child’s self-sacrifice. Hassan Hotari, father of the Dolphinarium bomber, reacted to his son’s attack by saying “I am very happy and proud of what my son did and, frankly, am a bit jealous...I wish I had done [the bombing]. My son has fulfilled the Prophet’s wishes. He has become a hero! Tell me, what more could a father ask?”⁸⁹

⁸³ Public Opinion Poll, June 2001, available at the website of the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre (JMCC), <http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/pop/01/jun/pop4.htm>

⁸⁴ Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre Poll, December 2001, available at <http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/results/2001/no43.htm>

⁸⁵ Mohammed Daraghmeh, “Palestinians Mark Intifada with Gruesome Exhibition,” *Associated Press*, in *Jerusalem Post* (Internet Edition), September 23, 2001; “Arafat Orders Exhibition of Suicide Bombing Closed,” *Associated Press*, in *Jerusalem Post* (Internet Edition), September 25, 2001.

⁸⁶ See Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Martyr Strategy: What Does the New Phase of Terrorism Signify?” *New Yorker*, July 9, 2001, p. 34.

⁸⁷ See Harvey Kushner, “Suicide Bombers: Business as Usual,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 19:329-337, 1996, p. 334.

⁸⁸ See Lee Hockstader, “At Arab, Israeli Schools, Hatres is Common Bond,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 2001, p. A1.

⁸⁹ Jack Kelley, “The Secret World of Suicide Bombers,” *USA Today*, June 26, 2001, p. 1A.

This social support has also extended into the larger Arab and Islamic world, where a plethora of editorials in Islamist, but also in some of the more moderate Arab and Islamic newspapers pledge support for the courageous deeds of the oppressed Palestinian people.⁹⁰ According to most terrorism experts, this ‘cult’ of the suicide bomber is among the most important reasons why there seems to be a steady flow of Palestinians willing to die.⁹¹

Another sociological aspect relates to the harsh demographic realities of Gazan society, which were described above. In one of the world’s most densely populated regions plagued by economic difficulties, achieving any degree of economic or personal ‘success’ may seem impossible. Becoming a martyr, on the other hand, may well present a remedy to this predicament by providing an opportunity to stand out of the crowd and becoming, literally, a celebrity. It certainly endows the *shaheed* with a sense of individuality that he is otherwise unlikely to achieve in any other way.

These sociological aspects are closely linked to psychological explanations of violence, which can help provide additional insight into the phenomenon.

Among psychological explanations of the phenomenon, theories of group dynamics seem particularly pertinent. First, many Palestinian youth seem particularly susceptible to peer pressure manifested by the cult of the suicide bomber as described above. Second, there is a certain element of pressure—although not physical—by the organization that plans the suicide bombing, as will be described. One mechanism that seems particularly important in pressuring the volunteer for martyrdom psychologically is the preparation of videotapes prior to the attack—an act that all but seals the fate of the ‘living martyr’, and will be described in more detail in Part III.

⁹⁰ See articles translated by MEMRI, <http://www.memri.org/>

⁹¹ Author’s interviews with Reuven Paz, Yoram Schweitzer, and Ehud Sprinzak.

It is also useful to briefly sketch some psychological theories of why individuals are driven to commit acts of violence. Some analysts argue that political terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces. Their ‘psycho-logic’, as Jerrold Post argues, is constructed to rationalize acts that they are psychologically compelled to commit. They are therefore drawn to the path of terrorism in order to commit acts of violence.⁹²

In another theory that could be applied to understanding suicide bombers’ motivation, C.R. Mitchell describes the need for groups in conflict situations to arrive at ‘cognitive consistency’. He mentions several ways in which they can achieve this, including ‘stereotyping’ and dehumanization of the adversary⁹³, clearly a common mode of conduct among many suicide bombers and their organizers, who often refer to Jews and Israelis as animals or subhuman creatures. A particularly telling example of dehumanization was provided by an 11-year old pupil at an Islamic school in Gaza, who said: “I will make my body a bomb that will blast the flesh of Zionists, the sons of pigs and monkeys. I will tear their bodies into little pieces and cause them more pain than they will ever know.”⁹⁴ Juergensmeyer regards this delegitimization as leading to the ‘dehumiliation’ of the humiliated group, as it provides escape from humiliating and impossible predicaments. “They become involved in terrorism not only to belittle their enemies but also to provide themselves with a sense of power...”⁹⁵

Human needs theory may provide another useful, albeit not unproblematic, model of why people resort to violence. James Davies writes that the frustration of substantive needs, such as

⁹² See Jerrold Post, “Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces, in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism*, p. 25.

⁹³ On stereotyping, see C.R. Mitchell, “Psychological Dimensions of Conflict,” in idem, *The Structure of International Conflict*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), p. 82. On dehumanization, see *ibid.*, p. 85, and R. Scott Appleby, “The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religious Justifications of Violence,” Carnegie/Notre Dame Conference on “The Role of Religion in Preventing Deadly Conflict,” Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem, August 1995, p. 19-20.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Jack Kelley, “The Secret World of Suicide Bombers,” *USA Today*, June 26, 2001, p. 1A.

⁹⁵ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 183.

the need for food, shelter, and self-actualization, facilitates the transition to aggressive behavior.⁹⁶ Human needs theory, however, is unable to explain why some people are willing to forgo their most basic needs (in the suicide bomber's case, the need to survive) for a religious or other commitment.⁹⁷

Albert Bandura's theory of the mechanisms of moral disengagement appears highly useful in providing further insight into psychological explanations for terrorism. Mechanisms of moral disengagement denote the disconnection, or 'disengagement,' of internal moral control from 'destructive conduct'—a process that requires intensive psychological training.⁹⁸ Bandura describes several such methods, some of which may help explain psychological processes at work: *Moral justification* involves cognitive restructuring of the moral value of killing and can help explain how reprehensible conduct can be perpetrated by 'decent' people.⁹⁹ *Euphemistic labeling* provides a convenient device for masking reprehensible activities or even conferring a respectable status on them. The use of the terms *istishhad* and *shaheed* is the obvious example. A third mechanism is *advantageous comparison*, which can serve a party to make self-deplorable acts "appear righteous by contrasting them with flagrant inhumanities.... Thus, terrorists minimize their slayings as the only defensive weapon they have to curb the widespread cruelties inflicted on their people."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ See Dennis J. D. Sandole, "Paradigm, Theories, and Metaphors in Conflict and Conflict Resolution: Coherence or Confusion?" in Dennis J. D. Sandole (ed.), *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993) p. 14.

⁹⁷ See also Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 52.

⁹⁸ Albert Bandura, "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement," in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism*, pp. 161-163.

⁹⁹ Albert Bandura, "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement," p. 164.

¹⁰⁰ Albert Bandura, "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement," p. 171.

Part III: Organizational Aspects of Suicide Bombings

A major argument in this study is that suicide terrorism must be understood as both an individual as well as an organizational phenomenon, where the individual aspects of suicide terrorism refer mainly to the set of motivations that draw many Palestinians to suicide terrorism.

Organizational aspects of suicide terrorism are just as important to understand, and will be discussed in the remainder of this study. Organizations are the key providers of the many resources and services necessary to sustain a prolonged and ‘effective’ campaign of suicide terrorism, including fundraising; the procurement of weapons and the technical know-how for their assembly and use; the recruitment, training, and indoctrination of the *shaheed*; overall decision-making and strategy planning; intelligence-gathering; target selection; and public relations.¹⁰¹

Suicide Terrorism as an Organizational and Group Phenomenon

The insights that organizational and group theory can bestow on the understanding of terrorism has often been underestimated, and studies that focus on organizational aspects of terrorism are therefore rare.¹⁰² In the following, a number of concepts adopted from organizational and group theory will be introduced and applied to the phenomenon of suicide

¹⁰¹ The author would like to thank Jessica Stern for her insightful comments on the role of organizations in terrorism.

¹⁰² A notable exception is Martha Crenshaw, who focuses much of her research on organizational aspects of terrorism. Ariel Merari, as has been noted, focuses on the organizational aspects of suicide terrorism.

terrorism. This discussion should be considered far from exhaustive, given the relative dearth of research both into the phenomenon of suicide terrorism, as well as into terrorism as an organizational phenomenon.

Strategic Fit

One concept within organizational theory that is often referred to by strategists is known as ‘strategic fit’. In this regard, the term ‘fit’, according to organizational theorist Mary Jo Hatch, describes “a successful strategy as one that brings what the organization can do (its competencies) into alignment with the needs and demands of its environment.” Strategy here is meant as “actively managing fit in order to achieve competitive advantage which will ensure the organization’s survival, profitability, and reputation.”¹⁰³ Organizations that possess strategic fit may reap both tangible and intangible benefits. According to Hatch, when the organization’s competencies match, or ‘fit’ the demands of the environment, the organization is selected, retained, provided with resources, and legitimized.¹⁰⁴

Applying this concept to the groups under scrutiny, one might argue that organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, who, as organizations, certainly strive for persistence and legitimization, believe their actions to promote a strategic fit with the environment. Given, then, the degree of support that suicide bombings enjoy among ordinary Palestinians, the continuous employment of suicide bombings could certainly promote a thinking whereby suicide bombings appear to be a rational strategy, since it helps consolidating legitimacy for the organization in the eyes of the public.

¹⁰³ Mary Jo Hatch, Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Post-Modern Perspectives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 102-103.

¹⁰⁴ See Mary Jo Hatch, Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Post-Modern Perspectives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 102-103.

Consequently, the concept of ‘strategic fit’ may help explain how continuous sympathy for suicide terrorism among the Palestinian public is likely to provide incentives to groups such as Hamas and PIJ to continue with these tactics.

Terrorism as a ‘Public Good’

Kent Layne Oots refers to terrorist groups as political organizations because they seek to provide, in the economic sense, ‘public goods’. A political organization, he writes, “seeks to further the common interests of its members through the provision of public goods,” which may be tangible goods, such as weapons or roads, or intangible goods such as, say, a new leader. The utility provided by these public goods may be positive or negative for society at large, though usually positive in the eyes of those who favor those goods.¹⁰⁵

Terrorist organizations, of course, differ in some significant respects from ordinary interest groups, particularly in the methods in which they attempt to provide these public goods.

Applied to the case of Palestinian organizations, one could argue that Hamas, PIJ, and Fatah attempt to provide public goods to their supporters and beyond. Hamas, for example, can certainly be said to provide public goods in the form of religious education, which would be a tangible public good. Its military wing also believes to provide public goods, yet probably of more intangible sorts, such as pride and dignity through resistance, and even a Palestinian state based on Islam.

Organizational Structure

Most terrorist organizations are structured hierarchically, with the memberships divided into ‘cells’ of between three and five persons. P.N. Grabosky studied the organization of urban

¹⁰⁵ See Kent Layne Oots, A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 45-46.

terrorists, yet many of his insights are also applicable to the organization of other terrorist groups, including groups that employ suicide terrorist tactics.

The ideal organization, Grabosky writes, does not permit “lateral communication between cells, nor vertical communication upward in the hierarchy. Thus, members of different cells remain unknown to each other, and the identity of a superordinate is known only to one member of a subordinate unit.”¹⁰⁶

A hierarchically arranged cellular structure carries both certain benefits, but also some disadvantages. Kohl and Litt, for example, have suggested that component units can be mobilized relatively easy if the cellular structure is arranged in a hierarchical order, At the same time, such a hierarchy is more vulnerable to “decapitation.” Meanwhile, a more decentralized organization will tend to be more durable, but the members will encounter problems of coordination. The optimal compromise, according to Kohl and Litt, lies in the form of “strategic centralization and tactical autonomy, a system that “leaves action units free to operate on their own initiative within guidelines established by a central command.”¹⁰⁷

Grabosky’s description of the organizational structure of terrorist groups accurately reflects the structure of Hamas and PIJ’s military wings, as we shall see later.¹⁰⁸ A tightly arranged cellular structure with as little lateral and vertical communication as possible is especially important given the secrecy under which Palestinian organizations engaged in suicide terrorism act.

¹⁰⁶ See P.N. Grabosky, “The Urban Context of Political Terrorism,” in Michael Stohl (ed.), The Politics of Terrorism, Third Edition (New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1988), pp. 59-84.

¹⁰⁷ James Kohl and John Litt, Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974), p.21-22, as quoted in P.N. Grabosky, “The Urban Context of Political Terrorism,” p. 63.

¹⁰⁸ It is likely that the structure of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the military wing of Fatah who is responsible for a multitude of suicide bombings mainly in 2002, is similar to that of Hamas’ and PIJ’s military wings. However, little information exists about Fatah’s military wing to make a conclusive statement about that.

Rewards of Membership

In most cases, members in groups and organizations expect to benefit from some type of material or immaterial reward. Within groups, benefits may vary from such immaterial rewards as social acceptance, or emotional affiliation with peers. This can result in a boost in self-esteem and a sense of pride in the group's achievement, which in turn leads to self-confidence derived from the individual's affiliation with the group.¹⁰⁹ Material benefits may include the provision of food, shelter, and clothing.

The suicide bomber, of course, will be affiliated with the organization for a limited time only, yet it is clear that he expects certain rewards from his affiliation, be it to him or to his family after his death. In addition, it is probably true that for many suicide bombers, it is the reward they expect after their death that provide them with additional incentives to kill themselves. These post-mortem rewards, as we have seen, can be material and immaterial benefits to the *shaheed*'s family. Organizations will typically pay off the families of the suicide bomber after their son's or daughter's death. It will also be the organization that planned the suicide bombing that will make sure that the *shaheed* will achieve transcendental fame. Hence, one could argue that in the case of suicide bombers, the organization delays the delivery of the rewards to the suicide bomber until after his death.

Group Forces and Psychology in Groups and Organizations

Understanding group dynamics in relation to terrorism is important for the simple reason that most terrorist activities are performed by groups, rather than individuals. In addition, even a superficial understanding of organizational dynamics, including that of terrorist organizations,

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Marisa Reddy Pynchon and Randy Borum, "Assessing Threats of Targeted Group Violence: Contributions from Social Psychology," *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, Vol. 17, 1999, p. 349.

needs to take group forces into account. One link between organizational and group theory can be found in organizational psychology, since “the psychology of people in organizations,” as Alexander Haslam writes, “is shaped by group forces.”¹¹⁰

Individuals join terrorist organizations for a variety of reasons, including the belief that acting as part of an organization will advance their political goals. But joining a terrorist group can serve certain psychological needs as well: Individuals affiliate with others who share similar views, ideas and personalities, and they satisfy their need of belonging by developing a shared identity and commitment to a cause. In terrorist groups, individuals can legitimize their collective grievances as well as their violent remedies. By sharing their identity, they eliminate conflict among themselves, and by forming a coherent whole, they achieve a real or perceived sense of protection.¹¹¹

Social psychology research has been particularly helpful in understanding the various effects that memberships in groups can have on individual behavior. Pyncheon and Borum have summarized the key principles of group behavior into four categories: group attitudes and opinions; group decision-making; motivations to group action; and the diffusion of individual responsibility in a group context.¹¹²

Some of these principles are relevant to terrorist organizations. In terms of opinion, for example, individual opinions and attitudes tend to become more extreme in a group context—a

¹¹⁰ S. Alexander Haslam, Psychology in Organizations: The Social Identity Approach (London: SAGE Publication, Ltd., 2001), p. 27.

¹¹¹ Compare Jeffrey Ian Ross, “Beyond the Conceptualization of Terrorism: A Psychological-Structural Model of the Causes of this Activity,” in Craig Summers and Eric Markusen (eds.), Collective Violence: Harmful Behavior in Group and Governments (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 184.

¹¹² Marisa Reddy Pyncheon and Randy Borum, “Assessing Threats of Targeted Group Violence: Contributions from Social Psychology,” *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, Vol. 17, 1999, p. 343.

process called group polarization that results from the group members' exposure to more extreme arguments, as well as from competition between group members.¹¹³

As far as group motivations are concerned, groups are subjected to an in-group/out-group bias, i.e. a need to see the group in a positive light, particularly when compared to other groups. This bias can lead to the stereotyping and dehumanization of members of other groups.¹¹⁴

Organizational Goals and Motives

A discussion on the goals and motivations of organizations with respect to suicide bombings seems important because, as has been mentioned, both individual as well as organizational motives are factors in the overall motivation to perpetrate a suicide attack. Organizational motives, meanwhile, are closely linked to the goals of organizations in general.

In 1938, Chester Barnard wrote that the function of the executive organization is to “maintain a system of cooperative effort,”¹¹⁵ which includes the maintenance of communication, securing personnel loyalty, and the formulation of the organization's purpose and objective, among other functions.¹¹⁶ In his classic study *Political Organizations* that appeared thirty-five years later, James Q. Wilson extended Barnard's definition of organizations. “Organizations tend to persist,” he wrote, by “producing and sustaining the cooperative effort,” which is threatened by a series of “strains” that include what we would today call a high turnover rate, fierce

¹¹³ Marisa Reddy Pyncheon and Randy Borum, “Assessing Threats of Targeted Group Violence,” p. 344.

¹¹⁴ Marisa Reddy Pyncheon and Randy Borum, “Assessing Threats of Targeted Group Violence,” p. 345.

¹¹⁵ Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 216.

¹¹⁶ Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive*, pp. 216-234.

competition, and lackluster personnel.¹¹⁷ Contemporary terrorism analysts agree that survival is a high, if not the highest priority for organizations, including for those involved in terrorism.¹¹⁸

When discussing what motivates organizations, two factors appear overriding: on the one hand, the use of terrorism as a strategic choice; and on the other hand, the group's ideological considerations.

Marsha Crenshaw argues convincingly that terrorism can at times be understood as an expression of a political strategy. Groups possess collective preferences, or values, Crenshaw writes, and “selects terrorism as a course of action from a range of perceived alternatives.” Groups make “reasonably regularized” decision making procedures, in which the effectiveness of terrorism as a course of action vis-à-vis other courses of action is the primary variable of measurement.¹¹⁹ Crenshaw is careful to add that strategic calculation is only one element “in the decision-making process leading to terrorism. But it is critical to include strategic reasoning as a possible motivation, at a minimum as an antidote to stereotypes of ‘terrorists’ as irrational fanatics.”¹²⁰

The second major element is ideology, which does not only play an important role in motivating the group, but also in strengthening group cohesion. Ideology is often believed to act as a guide to which the organizations and individuals that subscribe to it will stick by any means. Upon closer look, however, ideology is more malleable than might appear. Martin Seliger recognized this adaptability of ideology and distinguished between fundamental and operative

¹¹⁷ James Q. Wilson, Political Organizations (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 30-36.

¹¹⁸ Jerrold M. Post, for example, argues that “for any group or organization, the highest priority is survival. This is especially true for the terrorist group,” in Jerrold M. Post, “Terrorist Psycho-Logic,” p. 38. The author is indebted to Jessica Stern for comments pertaining to this section.

¹¹⁹ Martha Crenshaw, “The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice,” in Walter Reich (ed.), Origins of Terrorism, p. 8.

¹²⁰ Martha Crenshaw, “The Logic of Terrorism,” p. 10.

ideology.¹²¹ Fundamental ideology, according to Seliger, asserts the overall principles and determines the “final goals and the grand vistas.” Operative ideology consists of a line of arguments “whose purpose is to devise and justify the policies executed or recommended by a party, whether or not they deviate from the fundamentals. In the justification of policy in the operative dimension, description and analysis exert greater influence through the enhanced consideration paid to the norms of expediency, prudence, and efficiency, i.e. to technical prescriptions, which share in, or even replace, the centrality accorded to moral prescriptions in fundamental ideology.”¹²²

The separation of ideology into a ‘fundamental’ and a ‘pragmatic’ ideology has a parallel in organizational theory with respect to the organization’s goals. Here, the theory often distinguishes between ‘official goals’ on the one hand, and ‘operative goals’ on the other. Official goals tend to be more general because they provide a focus for the organization as a whole, and hence need to relate to a larger number of people. Operative goals “focus attention on the issues that require effort on the part of specific units and particular employees,”¹²³ and are therefore more concrete.

The above discussion can provide a useful framework to think about the goals and motives of an organization that employs suicide terrorism. In the following, some of the concepts discussed above will be applied to the case of Hamas.

To understand the elements of Hamas’ official goals, as well as its fundamental ideology, we will refer to the Hamas Charter, which was published in August 1988.¹²⁴ From the second

¹²¹ Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), pp. 175-208. The author would like to thank Ehud Sprinzak for comments relating to this section.

¹²² Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics*, p. 109.

¹²³ See, for example, Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory*, pp. 120-121.

¹²⁴ The translation of the Hamas Charter used in this discussion can be found in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 4 (Summer 1993), pp. 122-134.

chapter in the charter, one can infer that the official goals of Hamas are the destruction of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state in its place.¹²⁵ These official goals are based on the fundamental ideology, to use Seliger's term, that "the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf (Trust) upon all Muslim generations till the day of Resurrection. It is not right to give it up nor any part of it." It is further based on the belief that nationalism is an integral part of religious ideology,¹²⁶ and that "there is no solution to the Palestinian problem except Jihad."¹²⁷

Looking at the history of the Hamas movement, however, one can discern certain aberrations from the movement's official path—traces of the existence of operative goals on the one hand, and operative ideology on the other.

Following the signing of the Taba Accord in late September 1995, for example, the Hamas leadership in the West Bank and Gaza decided to suspend military attacks against Israel in order for the latter not to interrupt its withdrawal from occupied territories. An additional calculation had been that at a time when parties ran for the PA council, Hamas wanted to avoid upsetting the Palestinian public.¹²⁸ In another example, Mishal and Sela suggest that Hamas, after 1995, made an offer to PA to halt attacks against Israel if the PA would stop its persecution of members of Hamas' military wing, Izz-al-Din al-Qassam.¹²⁹ Such attempts by Hamas clearly ran counter to its official goals, and hence constitute a set of pragmatic, 'operative' goals.

Other operative goals of Hamas that come to mind include the derailment of the peace process, enhancing its prestige among Palestinians vis-à-vis the PA or other groups, increasing

¹²⁵ Hamas Charter, Chapter Two, Article 9 (Goals), p. 125: The goal of the Islamic Resistance movement therefore is to conquer evil, break its will, and annihilate it so that truth may prevail... and so that the call may be broadcast over the Minarets (lit. Mosques) proclaiming the Islamic state."

¹²⁶ See Hamas Charter, Chapter Three, Articles 11 (Strategy and Means) and 13 (Initiatives, Peace Solutions, and International Conferences).

¹²⁷ Hamas Charter, Chapter 3, Article 13.

¹²⁸ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 73.

¹²⁹ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, The Palestinian Hamas, p. 74.

its appearance as a legitimate opposition, promoting ties with the Islamic world, and defying the Israeli enemy's real or perceived strength.

For an organization, a strong impact of their actions on the audience may serve as an operative goal, and even as a motive for action. Bruce Hoffman said that “terrorism and the media are bound together in an inherently symbiotic relationship, each feeding off and exploiting the other for their own purposes”¹³⁰ The terrorist organization is well aware of this relationship, and many organizations exploit this fact brilliantly.

Organizations are certainly aware of the psychological impact of acts of suicide terrorism, which may in itself be an operative goal. Hamas, for example, often announces a series of ten or more suicide bombings in order to increase the psychological pressure on Israelis.¹³¹

Palestinian Organizations Employing Suicide Terrorism

Hamas – Izz-al-Din al-Qassam

Since the outset of the Second Intifada, no other Palestinian group has executed as many suicide attacks, and generated as many casualties among Israelis, as the radical Islamic organization Hamas (see Figures III and IV). Founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in Gaza in 1988, in the midst of the first intifada, Hamas—the acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement), and a word that means ‘zeal’ in Arabic—derives its ideological and organizational roots from the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement established in the 1920s in Egypt.

¹³⁰ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, p. 142.

¹³¹ See, for example, “Hamas Military Wing Promises ‘Wave’ of Suicide Operations,” *Palestinian Information Center*, July 17, 2001, in FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20010717000181.

The objectives of Hamas can be divided into short-term and long-term goals. In the short term, Hamas aims at establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, while its long-term goal remains the establishment of an Islamic state that would replace Israel. By adopting this order of objectives, Hamas, as Mishal and Sela have written, “effectively subordinated the former to the latter [objective] by emphasizing the provisional nature of any political settlement with Israel, thus achieving political flexibility without forsaking its ideological credibility.”¹³²

At its outset, and until the founding of a military wing in late 1991, Hamas focused primarily on religious and charitable services, known as *Da’wah*. These services include administrative bodies that provide medical and educational services; religious services such as religious education and religious preaching; and services relating to workers and students. Until today, the *Da’wah* remains a central element of the Hamas movement, leading even some Israeli experts to claim, not without justification, that “Hamas is essentially a social movement.”¹³³

Hamas asserts that its political and military wings are separated, with no direct links between the two¹³⁴—a claim that appears to be founded.¹³⁵ The first squads of Hamas’s military wing, Izz-al-Din al-Qassam¹³⁶, were formed in early 1991, following a crackdown of Hamas’ military infrastructure by Israelis.

¹³² Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, p. 3.

¹³³ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, p. vii.

¹³⁴ See for example “Hamas Leader Al-Rantisi on Netanya Attacks, Suicide Operations,” Doha Al Jazeera Satellite Channel Television, January 8, 2001, FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20010108000280.

¹³⁵ See for example, Khaled Abu Toameh, “From Cradle to Grave,” *Jerusalem Report*, September 4, 1997, p.34. At the time of this writing (April 2002), Israel conducts a self-declared “war on terrorism,” in the course of which it has occupied several cities under Palestinian control, including Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Nablus. In the course of Operation “Defensive Shield”, as the operation has been labeled, Israel may find evidence that will lead to a reassessment of the nature of the relationship between Hamas’s political and military wings.

¹³⁶ The group’s name is based on Izz-al-Din al-Qassam, considered by most Palestinian Islamic movements as a heroic figure—a pioneer of the Palestinian armed resistance and the father of the armed Palestinian revolution. For information on Izz-al-Din al-Qassam the individual, see Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 98-101.

Izz-al-Din al-Qassam is responsible for most terrorist attacks executed in the name of Hamas ever since 1992. On April 13, 1994, the Brigades planned and executed the first major suicide bombing at the central bus station in the central Israeli town of Hadera, in which five people were killed.¹³⁷ Initial activities of Izz-al-Din al-Qassam had an internal focus, as the military wing kidnapped and executed Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel. In December 1991, Doron Shorshan became the first Israeli citizen to be killed by Izz-al-Din al-Qassam.¹³⁸

Izz-al-Din al-Qassam emerged out of two groups, that together constituted the first military arm of Hamas, the *Majahadoun al-Falestinioun* (Palestinian Holy Fighters), and the *Jehaz Aman* (Security Section). The *Majahadoun al-Falestinioun* served as a military apparatus for terrorist attacks, particularly against Israeli targets, whereas the *Jehaz Aman* collected intelligence against Palestinian collaborators. Within *Jehaz Aman*, a violent operational arm was formed, labeled *Majmouath Jihad u-Dawa* (Holy War and Sermonizing Group). The latter was responsible for punishing those collaborators and other internal elements that were identified by the *Jehaz Aman*.¹³⁹

Both groups that together formed the early military arm of Hamas—the Palestinian Holy Fighters and the Security Section—were founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. The initial goal of the military wing of Hamas was to focus their struggle on “heretics’ and collaborators, in accordance with the view of the Muslim Brotherhood that Jihad should come only after the

¹³⁷ See “Suicide and Car Bombings in Israel since the Declaration of Principles,” Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0i5d0>

¹³⁸ ICT, “Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement),” available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>

¹³⁹ ICT, “Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement),” available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>

purging of rivals from within.”¹⁴⁰ Additional goals were to set up a military infrastructure, which included, inter alia, the stockpiling of weapons and the recruitment of operatives.

The January 5, 1996 assassination of Yihye Ayyash, the mastermind behind several suicide bombings that killed and injured scores of Israelis, sparked a renewed wave of suicide bombings that persisted until late 1997. In early 1998, after a harsh crackdown of Hamas’ military infrastructure by the Palestinian Authority, new insights into Izz-al-Din al-Qassam were gained. Interrogations of group members, many of which were from Nablus, revealed, according to Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela,

“an extensive, compartmentalized, military apparatus, which maintained close contact with the Hamas headquarters in the Gaza Strip, Jordan, and Lebanon using advanced communications methods, including the internet. The activities of the Izz-al-Din al-Qassam squads were divided among several senior regional commanders, whose names were on Israel’s ‘wanted’ list. They were constantly on the move from one district to another, assisted by the clergy and personnel of the mosques. These senior activists organized new military cadres and supervised their training for military operations.”¹⁴¹

As far as the recruitment for these operations is concerned, the hard core of Hamas uses the religious and social frameworks of the movement to staff its military wing’s personnel. To that end, Izz-al-Din al-Qassam activists try to identify young men with a particular dedication to religion, mostly in mosques, schools, and religious institutions.

At the time of this writing, Hamas has claimed roughly half of all suicide attacks perpetrated against Israelis during the Second Intifada—more than any other Palestinian

¹⁴⁰ Rivals included not only collaborators, but also drug dealers, sellers of pornography, and other elements accused by Hamas of acting against the principles of Islam. See ICT, “Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement),” available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>

¹⁴¹ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, The Palestinian Hamas, p. 78.

organization (Fig. III). In the twenty-three attacks organized and executed by Hamas between September 2000 and the end of March 2002, some 110 Israelis were killed, and almost 1,000 injured (Fig. IV). Hamas has demonstrated an extremely high lethality in its attacks, a fact that hints at the effective organization and information gathering capabilities, in addition to the large resources—both material and financial—that are at the group’s disposal. Accordingly, Hamas has been able to increase the numbers of Israeli casualties in almost every period under review. In the first quarter of 2002, for example, 47 Israelis were killed in three suicide attacks attributed to Hamas (Fig. V). Contrast this with Fatah’s eleven attacks in the same quarter, in which twenty-three Israelis were killed—half as many as in attacks attributed to Hamas (Figs. II, V).

Hamas, unlike PIJ, has not focused its suicide attacks solely on civilian targets. At least six attacks have targeted Israeli military elements. (Fig. VI). Figures VII and VIII demonstrate Hamas’ dominance in the Gaza Strip, as the five suicide bombers who were from the Gaza Strip all belonged to Hamas. Similarly, the only five suicide attacks against targets in the Gaza Strip were all perpetrated by members of Hamas (Fig. IX).

Palestinian Islamic Jihad – The Jerusalem Brigades

Unlike Hamas, the radical Islamist organization Palestinian Islamic Jihad (*Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami al-Filastini*) is dedicated exclusively to terrorist activities. Officially founded by Palestinian students in Egypt in 1980, PIJ, which is known for its secrecy and strict discipline, split from the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood due to the latter’s “lack of revolutionary spirit and style.”¹⁴² It was highly influenced by the 1979 Iranian revolution on the one hand, and the radicalization of Islamic student organizations in Egypt on the other.

¹⁴² See Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, p. xvii, p. 93.

Led by Fathi Shikaki until his assassination in Malta in 1995, PIJ is headed today by Dr. Ramadan Abdallah Shallah, a Gaza native educated in London, and with teaching experience at the South Florida University in Tampa, where he directed the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE).¹⁴³ The group maintains offices in Beirut, Tehran, Damascus, and Khartoum, and yields more influence in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas clearly dominates. (Figs. VII, VIII)

Hamas and PIJ both regard the ‘Palestinian problem’ as an Islamic problem rather than a national or merely Arab problem. The solution, as far as PIJ is concerned, is “an Islamic popular war of liberation, resulting in the destruction of Israel and the creation of an Islamic state in Palestine.”¹⁴⁴

One of the fundamental differences between the PIJ and Hamas relates to the groups’ strategies. Hamas believes that Islam should spread across the society prior to the struggle for Palestine. In contrast, PIJ, which considers armed struggle the strategy for political action, does not believe the Islamic transformation of society to be a precondition for the liberation of Palestine and the establishment of an Islamic state within its borders.¹⁴⁵

For PIJ, the elimination of Israel is an immediate goal, and this goal can only be achieved through immediate *jihad*. To spearhead this jihad, which should not be held off under any circumstances, PIJ sees itself as revolutionary Islamic vanguard capable to take on Israel in an all-out war.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ See ICT, “Palestinian Islamic Jihad,” available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>

¹⁴⁴ Elie Rekhess, “The Iranian Impact,” p. 11, quoted in Ziad Abu-Amr, Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza, p. 105.

¹⁴⁵ See Ziad Abu-Amr, Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza, p. 106.

¹⁴⁶ See Ziad Abu-Amr, Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza, p. 120.

According to Israeli and U.S. experts, PIJ's hard core consists of several cells numbering some several dozen members in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹⁴⁷ Similar to Hamas, PIJ is also divided into a military and a political wing. In an interview with Beirut's *Al-Manar* TV station in August 2001, PIJ leader Sheikh Ramadan Shallah said that it is PIJ's military wing, the so-called Jerusalem Brigades,¹⁴⁸ that determines the timing, venue, and type of suicide attacks. Shallah emphasized that "there is only one military wing and one fighting address under the banner of the Islamic Jihad Movement at this phase. It is the Al Quds Squads [i.e. Jerusalem Brigades]. It is the party I charge of carrying out operations in the name of [the] Islamic Jihad Movement."¹⁴⁹

PIJ began to carry out suicide attacks in the early wave of suicide bombings that hit Israel between 1994 and 1997. On November 11, 1994, a Palestinian recruited by PIJ detonated himself while he was riding a bicycle, killing three Israelis. PIJ is also responsible for one of the most costly suicide attack in Israeli history. On January 22, 1995, two bombs that exploded consecutively killed eighteen Israeli soldiers and one civilian at the Beit Lid junction on the Israeli coastal plain.¹⁵⁰

Between the end of September 2000 and late March 2002—the initial eighteen months of the Second Intifada—the PIJ has been responsible for roughly a fourth of all suicide attacks (see att), killing at least eleven Israelis, and injuring 178 (Fig. III). Figure II shows that the number of attacks during the Second Intifada perpetrated by PIJ have been on a slow rise, reaching four attacks in the first quarter of 2002, leading to an increase in the number of killed and wounded by PIJ to eight and ninety-four, respectively, in the first quarter of 2002 (Figs. V, X). Figures VI

¹⁴⁷ See Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Martyr Strategy," p. 35.

¹⁴⁸ Also known as Al-Quds [Jerusalem] Brigades, Al-Quds Squads, or Jerusalem Squads.

¹⁴⁹ "Islamic Jihad Leader Interviewed on Jerusalem Operation, *Beirut Al-Manar Television*, August 9, 2001, in FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20010809000114.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/>

and VIII show that PIJ targets predominantly civilian targets in Israel proper, including Jerusalem.

Fatah, Tanzim, and the Al Aqsa Martyrs

The third Palestinian organization to have employed suicide terrorism during the Second Intifada is Fatah, the dominant faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which in turn is headed by Yasser Arafat. As Figure III reveals, Fatah has been responsible for almost a quarter of all suicide attacks since the Second Intifada. Furthermore, Figure II reveals that Fatah has emerged into the most active organization in terms of numbers of attacks on Israelis. As a result of attacks by Fatah and affiliated organizations, 23 Israelis were killed, and 388 wounded between September 2000 and March 2002 (Fig. IV).

The armed wing of Fatah is known as the Tanzim, a group that has been responsible for much of the violence that erupted in the months following Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount. The Tanzim, Arabic for *organization*, is estimated to have between several hundred to a few thousand active members.¹⁵¹ It is headed by Marwan al-Barghouti, the secretary-general of Fatah in the West Bank, who was arrested by Israeli forces in Ramallah on April 15, 2002.

Yasser Arafat and the Fatah leadership set up the Tanzim in 1995 to consolidate the PA's survival by curbing the influence of those elements believed to threaten, or potentially threaten, the survival of the PA. The latter elements include the Islamist groups, in particular Hamas. Tanzim, however, was set up not only to offset Hamas and other Islamist groups, but also to keep the PA's own security services in check. The PA security services, who are controlled mainly by

¹⁵¹ See David Schenker, "Inside the Fatah Tanzim: A Primer," *PeaceWatch* # 284, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 6, 2000, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/> See also Ronni Shaked, "The Tanzim: Fatah's Fighters on the Ground," *Yediot Ahronot*, October 3, 2000, available on the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/>

PLO officials who returned from exile in other Arab countries, are considered by many to be corrupt. In contrast, the Tanzim “is the stronghold of the ‘insiders’,” according to a study conducted by the International Policy Institute of Counter-Terrorism (ICT).¹⁵² Being associated with the PLO ‘insiders’, the Tanzim is essentially a grassroots organization that enjoys wide popularity among the Palestinian community.

The activities of the Tanzim include the instigation and organization of anti-Israel demonstrations, in which armed Tanzim members often take up positions within Palestinian crowds, firing on Israeli soldiers from among them.¹⁵³ Other activities include shootings at IDF guard posts and border crossings, bombing attacks against IDF patrols, drive-by shootings and, most recently, suicide attacks.

The first suicide attack in the course of the Second Intifada that has been attributed to Fatah’s Tanzim took place on January 17, 2002 in Hadera, when 24-year old Abdul Salaam Sadek Hassouneh, armed with a rifle and a suicide belt, killed six Israelis.¹⁵⁴

Fatah’s Tanzim militia are critical of the terms of the Oslo process, yet do not seem to reject negotiations completely. The Tanzim have expressed their readiness for diplomatic cooperation with the United States and Europe under terms more acceptable to the Palestinians. Yet, as Tanzim leader Barghouti has assured, these aspirations have to be accompanied by “action on the ground”.¹⁵⁵

As the Second Intifada continues, a Fatah faction calling itself the “Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades” has taken the forefront in suicide attacks. In the first quarter of 2002, this group was

¹⁵² See ICT, “Fatah Tanzim: The Organization,” available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>

¹⁵³ See ICT, “Fatah Tanzim: The Organization,” available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>

¹⁵⁴ On the responsibility of Tanzim in the attack, see for example Ze’ev Schiff, “Israel Warns Hamas: Don’t Use Rockets,” *Ha’aretz* (On-Line Edition), January 20, 2002.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Graham Usher, “Fatah’s Tanzim: Origins and Politics,” *Middle East Report # 217*, available at http://www.merip.org/mer/mer217/217_usher.html/

responsible for about half of all suicide attacks against Israelis, rendering the group more active than any other group, at least in the early part of 2002. (Fig. II) It is partly due to the growing influence of Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades that the State Department decided to put the group on its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) in March 2002.

The Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades were formed after September 2000, and are assumed to consist of hundreds of members that are under the direct control of the Tanzim.¹⁵⁶ The links between Al-Aqsa and the PA leadership seem to be close. Maslama Thabet, a member of the Brigades, was quoted saying, "we are Fatah itself, but we don't operate under the name Fatah. We are the armed wing of the organization. We receive our instructions from Fatah. Our commander is Yasser Arafat himself."¹⁵⁷ According to a former FBI terrorism analyst, "the infrastructure, funds, leadership, and operatives that comprise the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and facilitate the group's activity all hail from Fatah... Most of the Brigades' leadership are salaried members of the PA and its security forces... Fatah is, by its own admission, Al-Aqsa's parent and controlling organization."¹⁵⁸

Fatah's formation of the Tanzim must be seen in the context of the attempt to channel and focus the passions of many Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza away from Islamist groups. Fatah's success in doing so depends on Yasser Arafat's standing in the public, which in turn is oscillating along with the political situation. Nevertheless, Fatah and the Tanzim are the most powerful secular force in the West Bank and Gaza, and offer a secular alternative to groups such as Hamas and PIJ.

¹⁵⁶ See Serge Schmemmann, "In the Arabs' Struggle Against Israel, There are Many Players," *New York Times* (Internet Edition), March 30, 2002.

¹⁵⁷ Matthew Levitt, "Designating the Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades," *PeaceWatch* # 371, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 25, 2002, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/>

¹⁵⁸ Matthew Levitt, "Designating the Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades," *PeaceWatch* # 371.

The PFLP

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is the other secular organization that has used suicide bombings during the recent violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. Founded in 1967 by George Habash, who resigned as the group's leader in May 2000, the PFLP is a Marxist Leninist terrorist organization that combines its leftist doctrine with Palestinian nationalism. On its website, for example, the PFLP asserts that it has a clear strategy for peace "which is characterized by its commitment to the creation of a democratic, pluralist state where the basic rights of all people are affirmed and protected. The first step in attaining this goal is to bring an end to the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian land."¹⁵⁹

Originally a member of the PLO, the group dissociated itself from the PLO completely after the 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles. It is believed to have roughly 800 members, operating in Lebanon, Israel, Syria, and the PA.

The group reached its pinnacle in the late 1960s and 1970s, when it carried out a number of spectacular airline hijackings. In the early months of the Second Intifada, the group was led by Abu Ali Mustafa, the successor of George Habash. Following a number of terrorist activities, including a number of lethal car bombings in Israeli cities, Mustafa was killed by the Israeli army on August 27, 2001. His succession by Ahmed Sadat, in October 2001, was seen as both a radicalization of the PFLP, as well as an attempt to consolidate the PFLP's presence in the areas under PA control.¹⁶⁰

Indeed, under Sadat, the PFLP seems to have achieved both. On October 17, 2001, the PFLP took responsibility for the assassination of right-wing Israeli Minister of Tourism Rehavam Ze'evi, in an apparent revenge for the killing of Mustafa. On February 16, 2002, the

¹⁵⁹ PFLP Website, <http://www.pflp-pal.org/faq.html/>

¹⁶⁰ "Ahmad Sadat: Radical PFLP Leader," BBC News, January 16, 2002, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

PFLP took responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed 2 Israelis and injured 29 at the West Bank settlement of Karnei Shomron. Roughly three weeks later, the PFLP sent a suicide bomber to a hotel lobby at the settlement of Ariel, where fifteen people were injured.

Inter-Organizational Relationships

Coalitions of organizations engaged in terrorist activity are a mixed blessing for the component groups. On the one hand, these coalitions have the potential to provide the individual groups with more and better resources. A coalition of terrorist groups is more likely to be innovative in terms of tactics than are individual organizations—“coalitions have the talents, resources, and weapons that are needed to commit new types of acts,” as K.L. Oots points out, particularly those acts that are difficult to plan and execute.¹⁶¹

On the other hand, coalitions are difficult to organize. As stated by Edward Mickolus, three such difficulties include the need to meet quid pro quo arrangements; personality and ideological clashes that are likely to occur; and the requirement to “make more people aware of the plans, resources, and membership of a group. Coalitions, therefore, pose a greater security risk than do single group actions.”¹⁶²

Coalitions as such do not exist between the groups that organize, execute, or provide logistical, financial, material, or moral support to acts of suicide terrorism, partly for the reasons described by Mickolus. Nevertheless, groups such as Hamas, Fatah, and PIJ have at times

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Kent Layne Oots, A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism, p. 114.

¹⁶² Edward F. Mickolus, “Combatting International Terrorism: A Quantitative Analysis,” 1981 PhD Dissertation, Yale University, quoted in Kent Layne Oots, A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism, p. 49/50.

cooperated with each other, and several of them have close relationships both among themselves as well as with other state or non-state actors.

Following the Israeli army's occupation of the West Bank city of Jenin in April 2002, several documents have been confiscated that suggest close operational cooperation in the Jenin area among Hamas and PIJ on the one hand, and Fatah, and PA security services on the other. That cooperation, according to IDF sources, includes cooperation in executing large-scale terror attacks in Israel. "The [PA's] security apparatuses provide the PIJ early warning with regard to the PA's intentions to act against them, and supply arms to the Hamas and the PIJ," according to the Israel Defense Forces website.¹⁶³

In the past, Hamas and PIJ have had a peculiar relationship. Prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, there were few connections between the two Islamist groups, and Hamas and PIJ in fact rivaled one another in the Gaza Strip. Limited cooperation on the operational level between Hamas and PIJ occurred only in the aftermath of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, when Hamas began to employ tactics of suicide bombings. One outcome was the suicide bombing at the Beit Lid junction mentioned above, in which the two groups cooperated to some extent. Following the assassination of Shikaki in 1995, the influence of PIJ in the West Bank and Gaza declined, leading to an improved relationship with Hamas.¹⁶⁴

Since the beginning of the Second Intifada, the two groups have cooperated on a very limited basis. PIJ leader Ramadan Shalah has expressed his disappointment at the lack of

¹⁶³ "Documents Captured by the IDF in Jenin," Israel Defense Forces (IDF) website, April 15, 2002, <http://www.idf.il/>

¹⁶⁴ See ICT, "Palestinian Islamic Jihad," available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>

coordination of the struggle against Israel, while expressing his willingness to reduce the gap between the organizations.¹⁶⁵

Generally speaking, Hamas criticizes PIJ for a number of reasons. First, it accuses PIJ of being part of the Fatah movement, forming an 'Islamic Fatah,' and hence of a duplication in doctrine. Second, Hamas accuses PIJ of ignoring the importance of religious education. Third, Hamas has often decried the close relationship between PIJ and Iran, leading some Hamas members to accuse PIJ of being a Shi'ite organization, and of carrying out Iranian policies.¹⁶⁶

Ironically, Hamas itself has developed increasingly close ties to Iran, particularly since the 1991 Gulf War. Hamas set up a small office in Iran, and the latter is said to provide Hamas with several million dollars a year for sabotage operations against Israel.¹⁶⁷

Both Hamas and PIJ seem to have ties to Hizballah. One Hamas leader, Khaled Meshal, said shortly after the beginning of the Second Intifada that Hamas has "good relations with [its] Hizballah brothers, and the path of jihad and resistance unites and enhances efforts. We ask God to help us enhance cooperation among all parties."¹⁶⁸

Representatives of all three organizations had a chance to meet during an "International Conference on the Palestinian Intifada" in Tehran in late April 2001. *Al-Manar*, the TV channel of Hizballah, has increased its coverage of the Palestinian issue, and is often the first source to identify the name, age, and affiliation of a Palestinian suicide bomber. Finally, Hizballah seems to coordinate its attacks on northern Israel with a deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, "Islamic Jihad Leaders Interviewed on Suicide Missions, Financing," *Liberation*, July 28, in FBIS-NES, Document ID EUP20010729000082. See also "Islamic Jihad Leader Vows to Adopt 'Offensive Strategy' Against Israel," *London MBC Television in Arabic*, April 2, 2001, in FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20010402000230.

¹⁶⁶ See Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, p. 124.

¹⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion on Iranian connections to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, see Elie Rekhess, "The Terrorist Connection - Iran, the Islamic Jihad, and Hamas," *Justice*, Volume 5, May 1995.

¹⁶⁸ "Hamas' Mish'al on Israeli Aggression, Suicide Operations, PA Ties," *Al-Bilad* (Jedda), October 13, 2000, in FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20001015000212. See also "Hamas's Mish'al: Jihad Palestinians' Sole Option," *Al-Zaman* (London), November 23, 2000, in FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20001123000110.

During Israel's occupation of several West Bank cities in April 2002, for example, Hizballah increased its attacks on northern Israel, in an apparent attempt to provoke Israel into escalating the conflict.

Hamas' attitude towards the PLO has also been ambivalent. As an Islamic organization that attempts to place the Palestinian struggle in a religious context, Hamas clearly competes with Yasser Arafat's PLO for support among ordinary Palestinians. At the same time, Hamas has persistently avoided intra-Palestinian violence and has expressed its willingness to consider at least a temporary ceasefire with Israel—proving that the organization is led not only by doctrinal considerations, but makes pragmatic calculations.¹⁶⁹

As far as the PIJ is concerned, it has relatively close ties to Yasir Arafat's Fatah movement, and reasonably close ties to the PFLP. As far as state sponsors are concerned, PIJ enjoys, beside Iranian support, close ties with Damascus. In September 1999, during a crackdown against Hamas by Jordanian royal troops, PIJ protested the crackdown out of its Damascus office, in cooperation with the PFLP, Fatah, and other groups.¹⁷⁰

The Organizations and their Tactics

Suicide Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare

The latest round of violence between Israelis and Palestinians has often been referred to as asymmetric warfare. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the concept of asymmetric warfare entails more than merely asymmetric military capabilities. It involves asymmetric values, asymmetric pressures, and asymmetric goals. Combined with qualitatively and quantitatively different military capabilities, these asymmetries lead to the use of asymmetric tactics.

¹⁶⁹ See especially the chapter on "Controlled Violence," Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, The Palestinian Hamas, pp. 49-82.

¹⁷⁰ Reuters, September 27, 1999.

In the course of the Second Intifada, Palestinian groups have used a wide range of asymmetric tactics, including kidnappings, guerrilla warfare, shootings on military installations and civilian populations, the launching of mortar grenades and recently of ‘Qassem II’ rockets. Militant Palestinians have planted numerous roadside and car bombs.

In asymmetric warfare, the respective sides use those tactics that are in their comparative advantage, in order to exploit their enemy’s relative weaknesses and real or perceived vulnerabilities. Generally speaking, asymmetric warfare implies that one side is either incapable (usually the weaker side) or unwilling (usually the stronger side) to use tactics similar to its opponent.¹⁷¹ Further, the stronger side will usually concentrate on the enemy’s ability to fight, while the weaker side will attempt to break the enemy’s will to fight.¹⁷²

The weaker side, which is our focus here, will usually attempt to achieve its goal of breaking its enemy’s will to fight by relying on at least some of the following methods: using tactics and weapons in ways that are difficult to prevent or defend against; employing the element of surprise; altering the battle space; attempting to employ all segments of its society; and targeting large segments of the enemy’s population.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, terrorist organizations utilize all of the above methods. By choosing suicide bombings, Palestinian terrorist organizations have adopted a tactic that is inherently difficult to defend against; that enjoys the element of surprise that characterize all bombing attacks; and that targets the entire Israeli population in a most indiscriminate manner. As has been shown, the use of suicide bombings enjoys widespread support among ordinary Palestinians. Finally, it is accompanied by an attempt to alter the battle space, in two respects:

¹⁷¹ Compare Kevin O’Brien and Joseph Nusbaum, “Intelligence Gathering Asymmetric Threats – Part One,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, October 12, 2000, available online at http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/usscole/jir001012_1_n.shtml

¹⁷² See, for example, Avigdor Haselkorn, “Martyrdom: The Most Powerful Weapon,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2000, p. 5.

first, it brings the conflict to Israeli cities, targeting mostly large population centers in Jerusalem and other Israeli cities (Fig. XIII). Second, most Palestinian terrorist groups attempt to mobilize the larger Arab and Islamic world to support their battle against Israel.

The weaker side attempts to achieve its goal of breaking the enemy's will to fight by instilling the element of fear in the society of the stronger side (Figs. XIV and XVI, f.ex., reveal that 78% and 72% of suicide bombings target Israeli civilians in Israel proper, including Jerusalem. Figs. XV and XVII reveal that the number of suicide attacks against civilians as well as against targets in Israel proper, including Jerusalem, are increasing). Abid al-Haleem Izaldain, for example, a PIJ leader based in Jenin, said that the real purpose of a "martyrdom operation" is that "it evens out the balance of fear even if it does not balance the military."¹⁷³ Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was quoted saying that "The Israelis...will fall to their knees...You can sense the fear in Israel already; they are worried about where and when the next attacks will come. Ultimately, Hamas will win."¹⁷⁴ Balancing out this element of fear is attempted through the systematic demoralization of the Israeli society, while exposing the powerlessness of the stronger side's government. At the same time, the martyr's zeal furthers his status as a role model and hence serves as inspiration to other potential volunteers.

Leaders of Palestinian terrorist organizations often justify the use of suicide bombings as a tactic used by a weaker side against the stronger side. One Hamas leader, Khaled Meshal, told an interviewer that the Palestinian people "are fighting with the tools they possess. They possess stones, and, therefore, they fight by using them. Had they possessed weapons, they would fight

¹⁷³ Vivienne Walt, "Dying for a Cause: West Bank Town Sees Sons Become Suicide Bomber," *Newsday*, August 20, 2001, p. A5.

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Burhan Wazir, "Suicide Bombing is Democratic Right, Says the 'Soul' of Hamas," *Observer*, August 19, 2001, p. 20.

with them.”¹⁷⁵ A comment by Ramadan Shalah demonstrates the attempt at demoralizing and intimidating the Israeli enemy: “Our enemy possesses the most sophisticated weapons in the world and its army is trained to a very high standard. We have nothing with which to repel killing and thuggery against us except the weapon of martyrdom,...” the PIJ leader said. “It is easy and costs us only our lives...human bombs cannot be defeated, not even by nuclear bombs.”¹⁷⁶

Tactical Advantages of Suicide Terrorism

Whether Ramadan Shalah is correct in claiming that “human bombs cannot be defeated” remains to be seen. It is less doubtful that terrorist organizations use suicide bombings with increased frequency, as Figure XVIII illustrates. One reason for this rise might be that organizations are increasingly aware of the distinct tactical advantages that this *modus operandi* offers.

Suicide attacks offer a better means of protection to the organization than do other attacks. Organizations do not need to engage in the process of planning an escape route—a highly problematic element of most ordinary terrorist attacks. Similarly, suicide attacks minimize the risk that suicide bombers will be caught, interrogated, and coerced into disclosing information about the sponsoring organization.¹⁷⁷

“Suicide attacks result in many casualties and cause extensive damage,” writes Israeli terrorism expert Boaz Ganor (see also Figs. XII and XIII) This is achieved mainly because the attack can be executed “at the most appropriate time and place with regard to the circumstances at the target location,” guaranteeing the maximum number of casualties when compared to other

¹⁷⁵ “‘ Hamas’s Mishal: Jihad Palestinians’ Sole Option,” *Al-Zaman* (Arabic), November 23, 2000, p. 4, FBIS-NES, Document ID: GMP 20001123000110.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” p. 68.

¹⁷⁷ See Boaz Ganor, “Suicide Attacks in Israel,” in ICT, Countering Suicide Terrorism, p. 137.

bombs, such as time bombs or remotely controlled explosives. “In this regard,” Ganor writes, “the suicide bomber is no more than a sophisticated bomb—a carrier that brings the explosive device to the right location and detonates it at the right time.”¹⁷⁸

The suicide attacker who sets out on a mission is virtually guaranteed to be successful, as it is difficult for security personnel to prevent the bomber from detonating his device, even if he is identified in advance. That said, there are cases in which suicide bombers have been intercepted, or other cases when their explosive devices failed to detonate. In fact, Israeli security forces are relatively successful in intercepting Palestinian suicide bombers, by snatching them before they set out on their missions, or by targeting them on their way to the target areas using remotely controlled devices or helicopter gunships.¹⁷⁹

Suicide operations are also very cost-effective, with the total price of an operation averaging about one hundred and fifty dollars.¹⁸⁰ Nasra Hassan quotes a Palestinian security official who points out that, “apart from a willing young man, all that is needed is such items as nails, gunpowder, a battery, a light switch and a short cable, mercury (readily obtainable from thermometers), acetone, and the cost of tailoring a belt wide enough to hold six or eight pockets of explosives.”¹⁸¹

Finally, suicide bombings have a major impact on the media, drawing many viewers to the television sets. As a result, the organizers of the attack meet an additional goal in reaching a large audience, and in increasing the element of fear they hope to instill on the target population.

¹⁷⁸ See Boaz Ganor, “Suicide Attacks in Israel,” in ICT, *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, p. 137.

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, Tim Johnson, “Living on a Hair-trigger Alert: Quick Action by Tense Israeli Civilians Helps to Foil Palestinian Suicide Bombers,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 23, 2002, p. A17.

¹⁸⁰ Nasra Hassan, “An Arsenal of Believers,” p. 39.

¹⁸¹ Nasra Hassan, “An Arsenal of Believers,” p. 39.

Brian Jenkins wrote in 1976 that “Terrorism is theatre,”¹⁸² and this seems particularly true in the case of suicide terrorism.

Recruitment, Training, and Indoctrination

Recruitment

Relatively few open sources to date reveal the methods employed by groups such as Hamas, PIJ, or Fatah to recruit, train, and indoctrinate Palestinians that have been selected for suicide missions. From the little open sources that are available, it appears that Hamas, PIJ, and Fatah have relatively similar processes of selection, recruitment, and training.

Typically, organizations will reject volunteers, and will select the candidates for suicide missions themselves. Organizations such as Hamas and PIJ generally hesitate to accept volunteers for a variety of reasons: First, there are simply too many volunteers. Second, candidates are chosen on the basis of religious devotion, trust, and the ability to keep a secret, and recruiters will naturally prefer to pick candidates that they have known for a longer period of time. Third, there is always a fear by the organizations that Israelis will attempt to plant collaborators into the organization.¹⁸³

In an article that appeared in the journal *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Harvey Kushner described the selection process as follows:

The selection process begins with members of the Izzadin el-Kassam or even the Palestinian Islamic Jihad circulating among the organizations’ schools and mosques during religious instruction. The recruiters broach the subject of dying for Allah with a group of students and

¹⁸² Brian Michael Jenkins, “International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict,” in David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (eds.), *International Terrorism and World Security* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 16.

¹⁸³ See article by Ron Ben-Yishai, “Anatomy of a Suicide,” *Yediot Aharonot*, January 27, 1995 (Hebrew).

watch the students' reactions. Students that seem particularly interested are immediately singled out for possible special merit.¹⁸⁴

In selecting the potential *shaheeds*, Hamas and other groups seem to place particular importance on several characteristics: the religiosity of the recruits; a clean criminal record so as not to raise the suspicions of Israel's secret service;¹⁸⁵ the ability to withstand severe psychological pressure; and the ability of the recruit to keep a low profile.

Recruiters of PIJ insist that they do not select candidates who have a tendency to be suicidal. In an interview with the *New Yorker*, PIJ member Abdullah Shami told a reporter that PIJ does not recruit "depressed" people. "If there were a one-in-a-thousand chance that a person was suicidal, we would not allow him to martyr himself. In order to be a martyr bomber, you have to want to live."¹⁸⁶

Shami and other PIJ members recruit their activists not only in mosques, but also in university campuses, through social activities, and even in Israeli jails. Ziad Abu-Amr, for example, writes that the PIJ leadership has been highly successful in recruiting new members in Israeli jails, and even suggests that this was one reason why the Israeli government began to deport PIJ leaders, rather than keeping them behind bars.¹⁸⁷

Religion, meanwhile, is an important element not only for Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but also for the secular Fatah. In late March 2002, an article appeared in the *Sunday Times* that claimed to feature an interview with several members of Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, including a 'living martyr'. According to 'Abu Fatah,' the living martyr's commander, Al-Aqsa recruits volunteers who are "reasonably religious, convinced of the meaning of 'martyrdom and

¹⁸⁴ Harvey Kushner, "Suicide Bombers: Business as Usual," p. 332.

¹⁸⁵ See Jack Kelley, quoting 'Hamas', in "The Secret World of Suicide Bombers," *USA Today*, June 26, 2001, p. 1A

¹⁸⁶ Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Martyr Strategy," p.36.

¹⁸⁷ See Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, p. 95.

jihad'. When picking a candidate, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, according to the *Sunday Times* article, sticks to the following rules:

“Anyone under 18 is rejected; so are married men with children and anyone without a sibling who may be a family’s sole breadwinner. Those who excel militarily and show steely composure in stressful situations are most likely to be chosen. They...should also be of build and shape that will enable them to move easily among Israelis—disguised if necessary in skull cap and wig, with ringlets down the side of the face—as they wait for the moment to strike.”¹⁸⁸

Interesting as these insights into Al-Aqsa’s criteria for choosing a candidate are, they should be read with caution. A recent female suicide bomber, Ayat Akhras, for example, was only sixteen years old when she detonated herself in front of an Israeli supermarket in March—two years below Al-Aqsa’s alleged ‘threshold’. Further, Israelis certainly differ in ‘size and shape,’ hence the need for a candidate to resemble the Israeli in “size and shape” seems murky.

Training and Indoctrination

The training and indoctrination of the ‘candidate for martyrdom’ are among the core tasks of organizations that use suicide bombings as a tactic. Here, too, little reliable and unclassified information is available.

Most suicide bombers undergo between several weeks to several months of training,¹⁸⁹ although that period can differ, depending on the urgency of the timing and the degree of pressure exerted on the organization. One high-ranking IDF official pointed out that the threat of assassination, for example, disrupts the smooth planning of suicide attacks, as the organizers are

¹⁸⁸ Hala Jaber, “Inside the World of the Palestinian Suicide Bomber,” *Sunday Times* (London), March 24, 2002.

¹⁸⁹ See Ariel Merari, quoted in Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 78.

obliged to spend more time on their personal safety, and hence have less time available planning and organizing suicide attacks.¹⁹⁰

During the training period, the candidates are subjected to both religious indoctrination and anti-Israeli propaganda. Volunteers attend classes, usually between two and four hours a day, where emphasis is placed on those parts of the Quran and Hadith that glorify martyrdom, and that are promised the benefits of the afterlife.¹⁹¹ Harvey Kushner adds that “students are assigned various tasks to test their commitment: delivering weapons for use in clandestine activities is a popular way to judge the student’s ability to follow orders and keep a secret.”¹⁹²

Besides indoctrination, the candidate will also undergo a process of cleansing and spiritual purification while he is being trained. He will go on lengthy fasts, will spend most of the nights praying; pay off all his debts; and ask for forgiveness for sins and offenses he may or may not have committed.¹⁹³

When the candidate for the suicide mission is indoctrinated, has proven to understand and believe in the relevant parts of the Quran, and has manifested his courage as well as his ability to keep a secret, he will usually go through several final stages, shortly before he will embark on his or her mission.

In most cases, the candidate will ‘disappear’, leaving his home and family without a trace.¹⁹⁴ During this time, he will undergo intensive training for several days, and will acquaint

¹⁹⁰ Author’s interview with a high-ranking IDF official.

¹⁹¹ The martyr is particularly encouraged to read six specific chapters of the Quran that feature such themes as jihad, the birth of the nation of Islam, war, Allah’s favors, and the importance of faith. See Nasra Hassan, “An Arsenal of Believers,” p. 41.

¹⁹² Harvey Kushner, “Suicide Bombers: Business as Usual,” p. 333.

¹⁹³ Nasra Hassan, “An Arsenal of Believers,” p. 41.

¹⁹⁴ In a recent article on the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, one candidate was said to have spoken to his mother while under training. There is not enough information available at this point to establish whether this was an outlier case, or whether Fatah’s training is less stringent than that of Hamas and PIJ, enabling the candidate to stay in touch with his family throughout the process. See Hala Jaber, “Inside the World of the Palestinian Suicide Bomber,” *Sunday Times* (London), March 24, 2002.

himself with most operational aspects of his mission, including how to detonate the explosive device.¹⁹⁵

In rare cases, the training at this stage will also involve mock burials of one or several candidates, in order to test their readiness to die by showing no fear of death. In an article that appeared in 1995, a Palestinian intelligence officer told a *Newsweek* reporter how Hamas

“put two or three people together in the grave and cover[ed] it, as if they were really dead. After two or three minutes they let them out. Then they determine who is the strongest among them, and later they put the chosen one in the grave by himself. They tell him to recite a special part of the Quran...Then they get him out. They leave him for two days and nights by himself. He sees nobody, nothing; he’s totally alone, just reading the Quran. Then they study him to see if he’s ready. They tell him: ‘Now you are great, you are holy, you are ready to go to heaven’.”¹⁹⁶

In the last days before the bombing, the candidate will prepare his will in the form of a letter, audio tape, or video cassette, shot against the background of the sponsoring organization’s banner. He will usually pose with the Quran in one hand, and a gun or a bomb in the other. In the video recording, the martyr will usually praise the holy war and call upon his brethren to follow his example. He then will watch the tape over and over again in order to familiarize himself with his impending mission.¹⁹⁷ Just before the bomber sets out on his mission, Nasra Hassan writes,

He performs a ritual ablution, puts on clean clothes, and tries to attend at least one communal prayer at a mosque. He says the traditional Islamic prayer that is customary before battle, and he

¹⁹⁵ Compare Boaz Ganor, “Suicide Attacks in Israel,” p. 140. According to Ganor’s excellent study, the bomber will understand *all* operational aspects during this stage. However, there are indications, which will be mentioned later, that the suicide bomber will be unaware of the location and type of attack until the very last moments before his mission.

¹⁹⁶ Jeffrey Bartholet, “A Guaranteed Trip to Heaven,” *Newsweek*, April 24, 1995, p. 42.

¹⁹⁷ Nasra Hassan, “An Arsenal of Believers,” p. 41.

asks Allah to forgive his sins and to bless his mission. He puts a Quran in his left breast pocket, above the heart, and he straps explosives around his waist or picks up a briefcase or a bag containing the bomb. The planner bids him farewell with the words 'May Allah be with you, may Allah give you success so that you achieve Paradise.' The would-be martyr responds, "Inshallah, we will meet in Paradise."

The purpose of the recruitment, training, and indoctrination process is for the organization to reach its goal of staging a terrorist attack, while minimizing the risks involved. These include the risk of failure, of group exposure, and of wasting resources. The organization attempts to achieve its objectives by recruiting the right candidates—those who remain terse and are committed to secrecy—and by training and indoctrinating these individuals. Both training and indoctrination involve the mental preparation to commit a highly violent act that entails one's own death. To that end, the organization instills the candidate with religious and political indoctrination, in the course of which the terrorist act will be given a moral, political, and religious justification.

According to Ariel Merari, the organization and the individual form some kind of 'social contract' that the candidate will find difficult, if not impossible, to break. The contract can be sealed at the end of a three-pronged process: First, long meetings between the trainee and trainers. During these 'peptalks', several issues are discussed: the humiliation suffered as a result of the Israeli occupation; early Arab glory, juxtaposed with the current state of Arab and Islamic affairs; the glorification of martyrdom as a heroic act; and the benefits of being a martyr. Second, organizations use methods of group pressure. Third, the individual is compelled to commit himself personally and publicly by videotaping himself.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Lecture by Ariel Merari at the Fletcher School, in Assaf Moghadam, "Fletcher Hosts Ariel Merari, Israeli Expert on Suicide Terrorism," *Fletcher Ledger*, February 4, 2002, available at <http://www.fletcherledger.com/archive/2002-02-04/020402-NfinalSuicideTerrorism.htm/>

Group leaders are well aware that group pressure, peptalks, and the recording of a videotape will all but seal the *shaheed*'s fate. For organizations, preventing the candidate from changing his mind in the last moment is a top priority. By employing these forms of pressure, the organizations achieve their goal, since the *shaheed* comes to understand that a sudden change of mind would be tantamount not only to betrayal, but also to shame. The *shaheed* reaches, as Merari says, a "point of no return." "From then on, he is the living martyr."¹⁹⁹

Planning and Execution

Suicide bombers are usually sent out to perpetrate the attacks relatively soon after the training and indoctrination period, for three main reasons: first, for a fear that they might change their mind; second, because the longer they are living martyrs, the higher the chances that they will let other people in on their secret; third, the longer they wait, the higher the chance that Israelis will intercept the suicide bombers.

The execution of any suicide bombing is an extremely secretive and carefully planned act, regardless of the sponsoring organization. Once the decision to perpetrate an attack has been made, the organization needs to gather intelligence, assemble the bombing material, and organize the departure for the attack target selection.²⁰⁰

Weapon procurement: Most of the materials used in suicide bombings come from Egypt, where they are smuggled into the Gaza Strip either by sea or in underground tunnels. The seizure of the Karine-A ship in early 2002 suggested that Iran is another major supplier of weapons to the Palestinians. Among the weapons confiscated by an Israeli naval commando on the night of

¹⁹⁹ Assaf Moghadam, "Fletcher Hosts Ariel Merari, Israeli Expert on Suicide Terrorism," *Fletcher Ledger*, February 4, 2002, available at <http://www.fletcherledger.com/archive/2002-02-04/020402-NfinalSuicideTerrorism.htm/>

²⁰⁰ See Boaz Ganor, "Suicide Attacks in Israel," in ICT, *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 141.

January 3, 2002 were about 1.5 tons of explosives believed by the Israeli military intelligence to have been destined for use in suicide bombings.²⁰¹

Division of Labor and Compartmentalization: To guarantee the secrecy of the attack plan, the planning stage is highly compartmentalized. According to a report in the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot*, the process is divided as follows: The organizational leadership is the top decision-making body, and decides on the need to execute a suicide attack. Next comes the operator, who is responsible for the selection of the *shaheed* as well as his aides. The aides, in turn, will bring in the explosives, organize the means of transportation, and provide all other necessary items such as fake identity cards, Israeli army uniforms, wigs, or other means of camouflage. It is the operator who will eventually assemble the electronic apparatus for the explosive, which needs to be easy to operate.²⁰²

The so-called martyrdom cell (*Al khaliyya al istishhadiyya*) is the fundamental unit that organizes each suicide attack, and is tightly compartmentalized. The cell consists of the operator and two or three aides. The cell members, each of whom bears the title *al shaheed al hayy* (the living martyr), do not disclose their membership in the cell to their families and friends. Neither do they know the identity of their other cell members, except for that of the leader. At the end of each attack, the martyrdom cell is dissolved.²⁰³

The suicide bomber and the other cell members do not know the exact location of the attack, both for security reasons, as well as to prevent the suicide bomber from visiting the place

²⁰¹ See, for example, Yossi Klein Halevi, "Stop Terror at its Source: Iran," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2002, p.11.

²⁰² See Ron Ben-Yishai, "Anatomy of a Suicide," *Yediot Aharonot*, January 27, 1995 (Hebrew).

²⁰³ Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," p. 41.

in advance. The organization is concerned that the suicide bomber who would visit the location in advance could change his mind about carrying out the operation due to a bad conscience.²⁰⁴

The suicide bomber will often be disguised as a religious Jew, an Israeli soldier, or a tourist. He will often have an easy enough time crossing from the West Bank into Israel, given the highly porous nature of the Green Line. It is generally more difficult to cross the border from the Gaza Strip to Israel, which explains why only five attacks (or 10% of all attacks) in the first eighteen months of the Second Intifada have been perpetrated in Gaza, by Gazans. (Figs. IX, XI).

Target Selection: Israeli interrogations of suicide bombers have shed some light on some of the operational methods used by suicide bombers. According to a report in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, Israeli interrogations of suicide bombers whose attacks have been foiled established that the *shaheeds* were instructed to target large public shopping or leisure venues; to attack crowds or civilians; to synchronize the detonation of an explosive with the gathering of a line at the entrance to a large public venue; and to avoid security check areas by finding an area at some distance from security personnel.²⁰⁵

It will remain to be seen whether groups such as Hamas will make sophisticated attempts to combine toxic elements in the explosive mix of the suicide bomber. To date, at least three suicide bombings have given Israelis reason for concern: On May 18, 2001, Mahmud Ahmed Marmash, who detonated himself in front of a shopping mall in Netanya, was found to carry Hepatitis B. Several weeks later, the suicide bomber of a Tel Aviv nightclub, Saeed Hotari, was

²⁰⁴ See Ron Ben-Yishai, "Anatomy of a Suicide," *Yediot Aharonot*, January 27, 1995 (Hebrew).

²⁰⁵ Amos Harel, "Suicide Bombers Instructed to Aim for the Front of the Line," *Ha'aretz* (On-Line Edition), July 16, 2001.

also found to carry Hepatitis B.²⁰⁶ Following the findings of the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute, the Israeli government decided to vaccinate all victims of terrorist attacks against Hepatitis B.²⁰⁷

Finally, in early December 2001, a suicide bomb that went off in downtown Jerusalem was found to have contained rat poison. Although investigators established that the poison burnt in the explosion, Israeli intelligence chiefs were quoted saying that they believed Palestinian bomb-makers were trying to acquire lethal toxins for future suicide attacks.²⁰⁸

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first was to offer a framework of analysis for understanding suicide terrorism as an individual and organizational phenomenon. Second, to apply the model to the case of Palestinian suicide terrorism in the first eighteen months of the Second Intifada, October 2000 until March 2002.

The model introduced here is based on the assumption that the phenomenon of suicide terrorism needs to be understood both from the individual and the organizational level. An organization without volunteers will not be able to translate its goals into practice, while an individual who is willing to die and to kill would normally lack the resources, information, and logistical capacity to turn his intentions into deeds.

The model offered here argues that there are different sets of motivations emanating from both the individual and from the organization. Organizational motives should be understood as the organization's intention to organize suicide attacks based on their political and tactical

²⁰⁶ Efrat Milner, "Israel: Bombers were Hepatitis B Carriers; Denies Visa Issued to Tel Aviv Bomber," *Yediot Aharonot*, June 7, 2001, in FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20010607000089.

²⁰⁷ "Israel: All Victims of Terrorist Attacks to be Vaccinated against Hepatitis B," *Ma'ariv*, August 14, 2001, in FBIS-NES, Document ID GMP20010814000071.

²⁰⁸ Daniel McGoroy, "Israel Fears Chemical Attack by Hamas Suicide Bombers," *Times*, January 2, 2002.

considerations. At the same time, Palestinian individuals are subjected to a different set of motives—sociological, religious, nationalist, personal, or psychological—that result in the generation of a willingness to die. The model offered here argues that at the recruitment stage, the individual's willingness to die merges with the organization's willingness to kill. It is from this point on that the 'volunteer for martyrdom' becomes institutionalized and undergoes strict training and indoctrination. The goal of this process is to make sure that the volunteer is entirely committed to becoming a martyr. This second phase results in the actual suicide attack.

Regarding the motivations of those Palestinians that volunteer for suicide missions, two major conclusions can be reached: First, most of the Palestinian individuals who volunteer for suicide missions seem to be influenced by several motivations at once, although the exact combination of these motivations varies from case to case. Therefore, one volunteer for martyrdom may be affected by, say, religious and national motives, while another may be more influenced by personal benefits, and may have been more susceptible to group pressure at the same time. It is impossible to trace the exact combination of motives because some of the motives are difficult to distinguish from each other, and in fact often feed on one another. It is difficult, for instance, to separate out economic from personal motives when it is clear that economic distress has a bearing on the individual's dignity, or may create an urge for him to exact revenge against those sources he holds responsible for his misery.

Second, it is unlikely—although not impossible—that a single motive among those identified would be sufficient for a Palestinian individual to be willing to sacrifice his life. Nationalist and economic motives alone, for example, are not sufficient explanations as to why groups will use suicide bombings as a tactic. Many other nations are struggling for national self-determination without resorting to suicide terrorism, and the existence of economic hardships is a

global phenomenon that does not always lead to a ‘culture’ of suicide bombings. The same can be said of religious motives, especially when it is considered that few Arab or Islamic countries—including those that host a relatively large number of radical Islamists—are subjected to suicide bombings.

More important may be the fact that the conflict bears a strong religious dimension, which manifests itself in the fact that the terms Israeli, Jew, and Zionist are used virtually interchangeably. Unfortunately, a deep-seated animosity towards Jews seems likely to serve as an additional incentive to commit acts of suicide terrorism. Indeed, antisemitism seems to become an increasingly dominant feature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It seems painfully obvious that many Palestinian suicide bombers believe that the benefits of becoming a martyr outweigh the costs. Becoming a martyr, many believe, is the fulfillment of a religious command. It provides an escape out of the humiliation sensed by most Palestinians. It provides the suicide bomber and his family with a multitude of tangible and intangible benefits, and offers an afterlife in paradise that is obviously preferred to life in such depressing refugee camps as Khan Yunis, Jebalya, and others. It bestows upon the Palestinian youth a sense of achievement, and it offers him an opportunity to stand out from the crowd. It offers him a way to exact revenge on the despised Israeli/Jewish enemy while humiliating him and exposing his weaknesses. Last, but not least, he is fighting for his homeland, which he believes was illegally taken away from him and his family. A ‘cost-benefit analysis’ undertaken by the ‘volunteer for martyrdom’, therefore, may result in the *shaheed*’s conviction that martyrdom is a tempting, even attractive, option; and that the rewards that martyrdom offers come at a relatively low price. That price may or may not include a mourning family. But, then again, the *shaheed* is probably convinced that he will rejoin his loved ones in heaven anyway.

Aware of what motivates the potential martyrs, organizations seek out candidates that have the highest promise to achieve the organization's goals while minimizing the risks of failure, exposure, and the wasting of resources. The purpose of the training and indoctrination process, meanwhile, is to prepare the candidate mentally by instilling him with religious and political propaganda that will justify his deed, while committing him to the act through peptalks, the shooting of videotapes, and group pressure.

The breadth of motivations makes it difficult for a state that fights this form of terrorism to attempt to tackle the 'root causes' of the conflict in the shorter run, rather than trying to focus the fight against terrorism on the organizations that sponsor suicide missions. Hence, in the short run, Israel may have no other choice than to focus its fight against terrorism on the organizations that plan and execute suicide attacks. This may help explain Israel's attempt to 'destroy the terrorist infrastructure' by staging incursions into Palestinian cities such as during 'Operation Defensive Shield' of April 2002.

In the longer run, however, it is unlikely that a military solution to the problem can be found as long as Palestinians continue to be highly motivated to volunteer for suicide attacks. Hence, a major challenge for Israel in the years to come will be to find ways to make suicide bombings less attractive in the eyes of a growing number of Palestinians.

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Zimbardo, Philip, and Vallone, Robert (eds.), Persuasion, Coercion, Indoctrination, and Mind Control (Lexington, MA: Ginn Custom Publishing, 1983)

APPENDIX: STATISTICS AND CHARTS

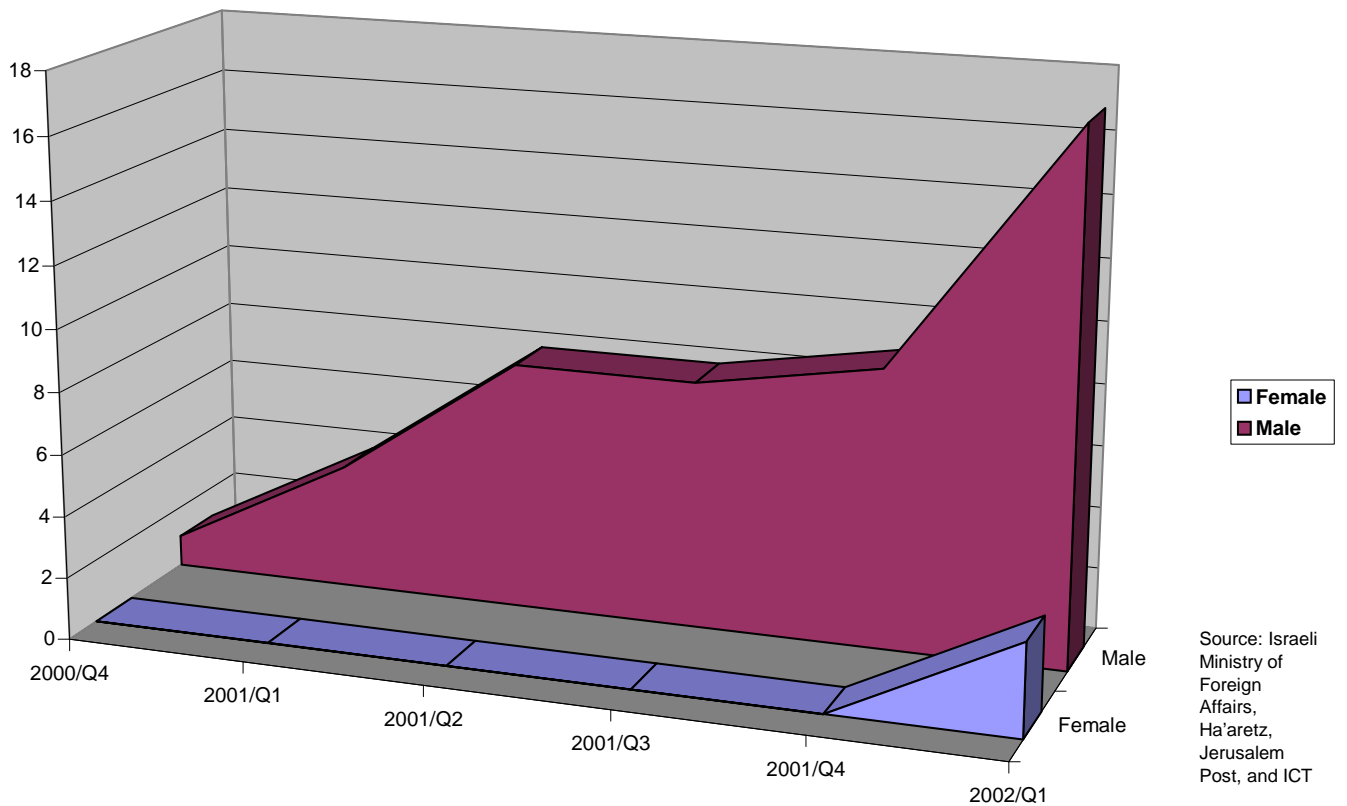
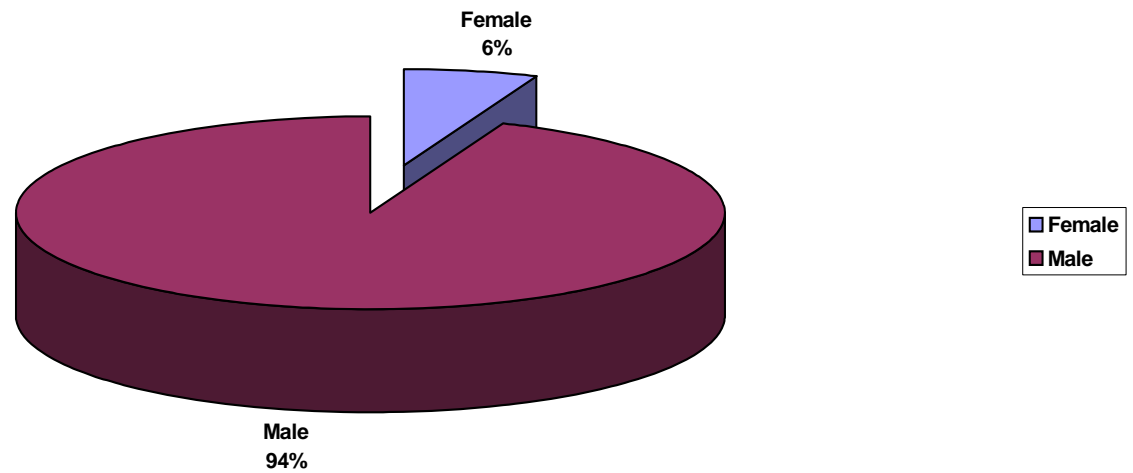
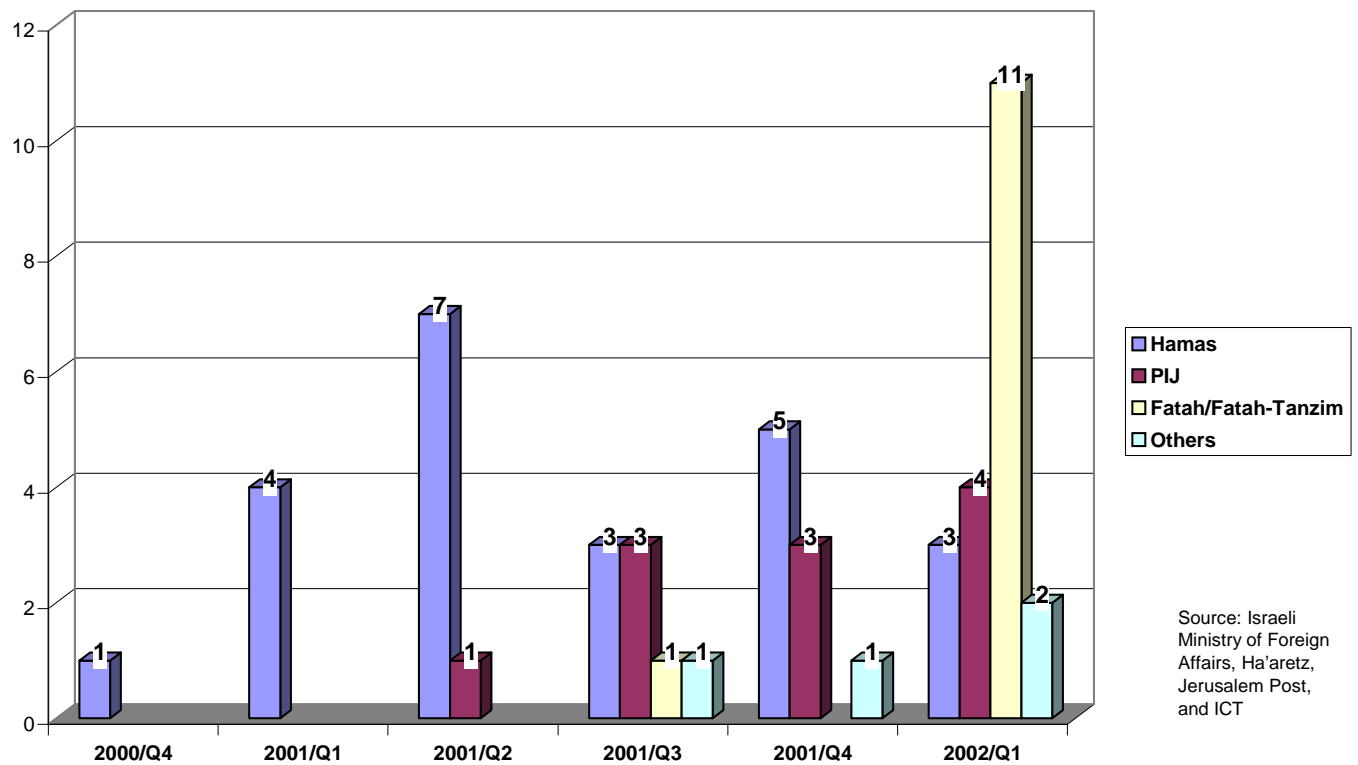
Fig. I: Gender of Attacker by Quarter

Fig. 1a: Suicide Attacks in Israel, Jerusalem, and WBGS by Gender, October 2000 - March 2002

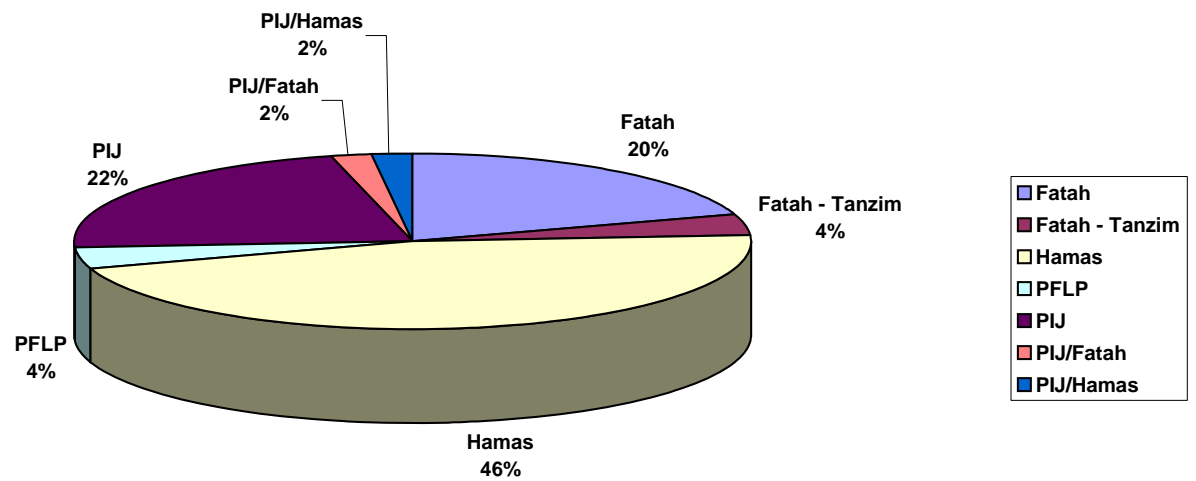


Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post, and ICT

Fig. II: Suicide Attacks in Israel, Jerusalem, and WBGS by Organizations - Time Series



**Fig. III: Percentage of Suicide Attacks by Organization,
October 2000 - March 2002**



Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post, and ICT

Fig. IV: Killed and Wounded in Israel, Jerusalem, and WBGS by Organization, October 2000 - March 2002

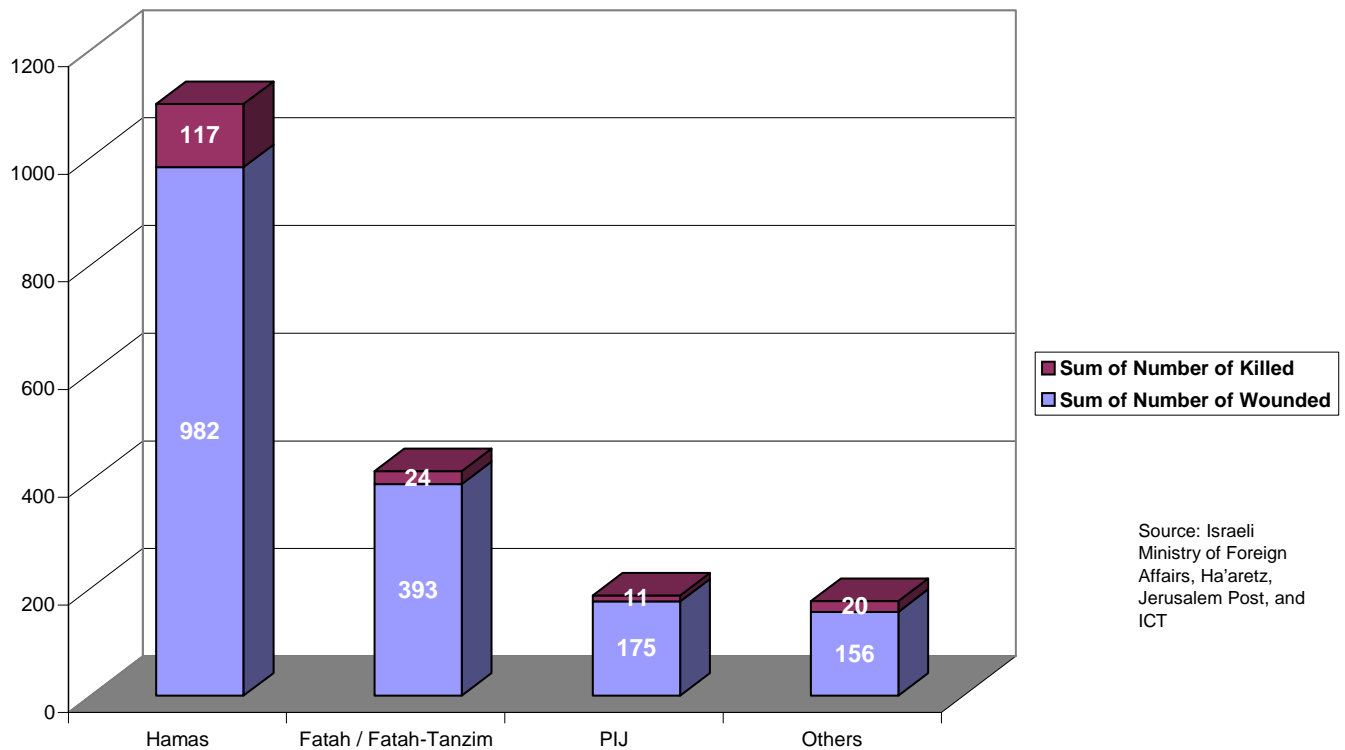
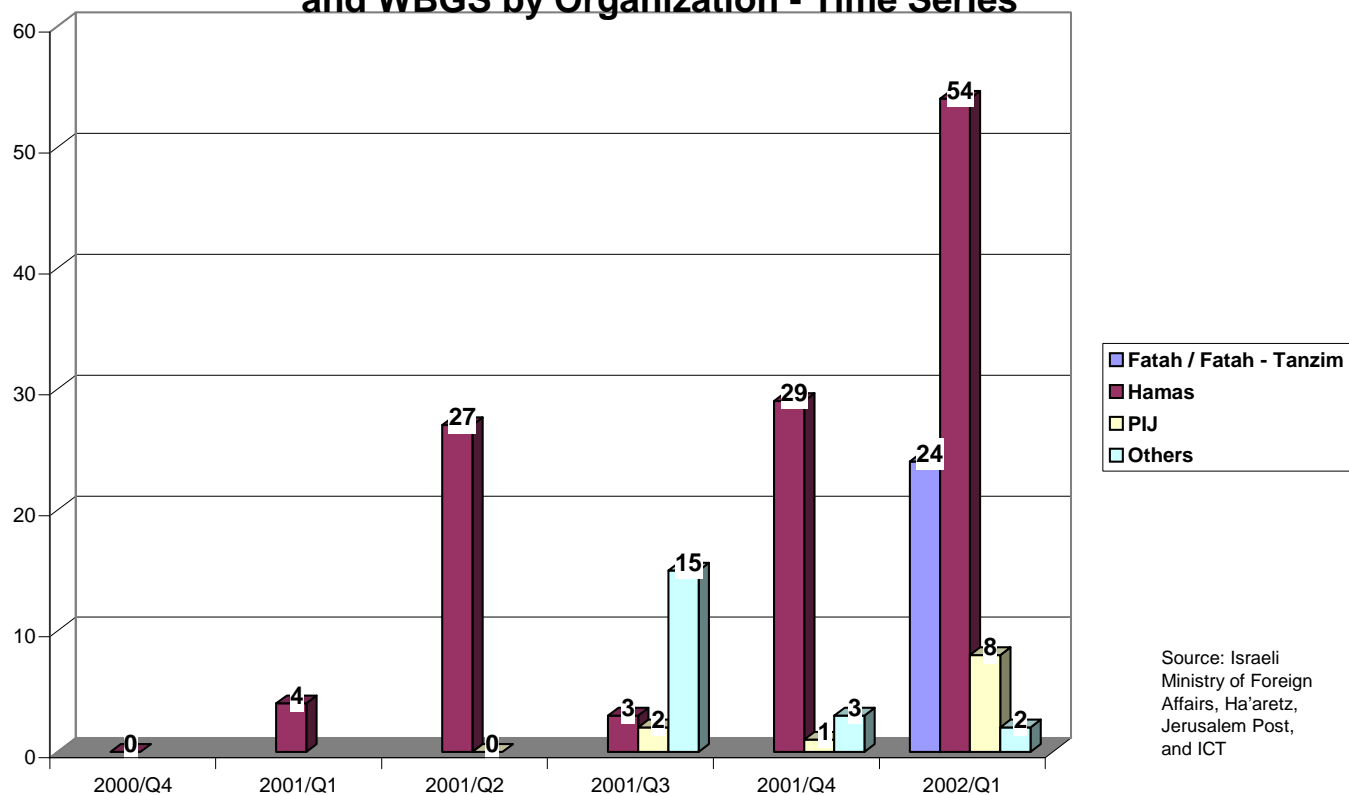
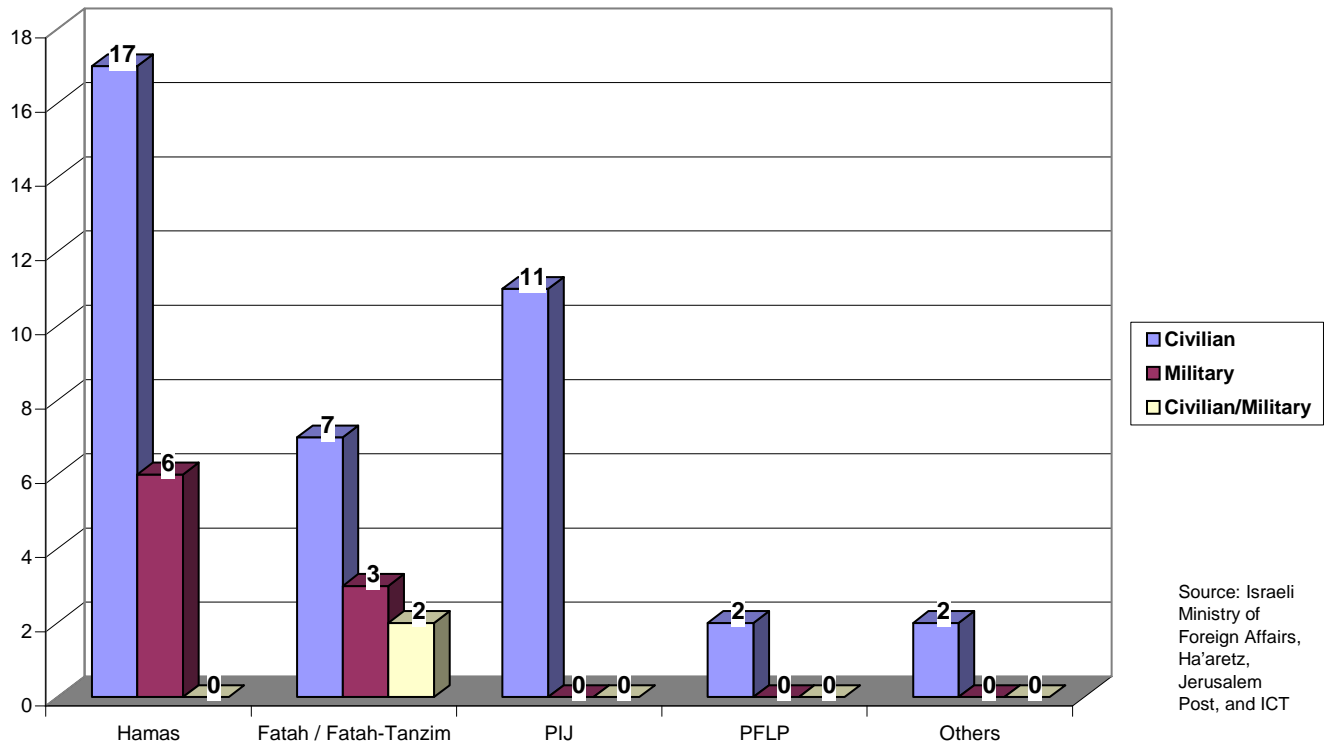


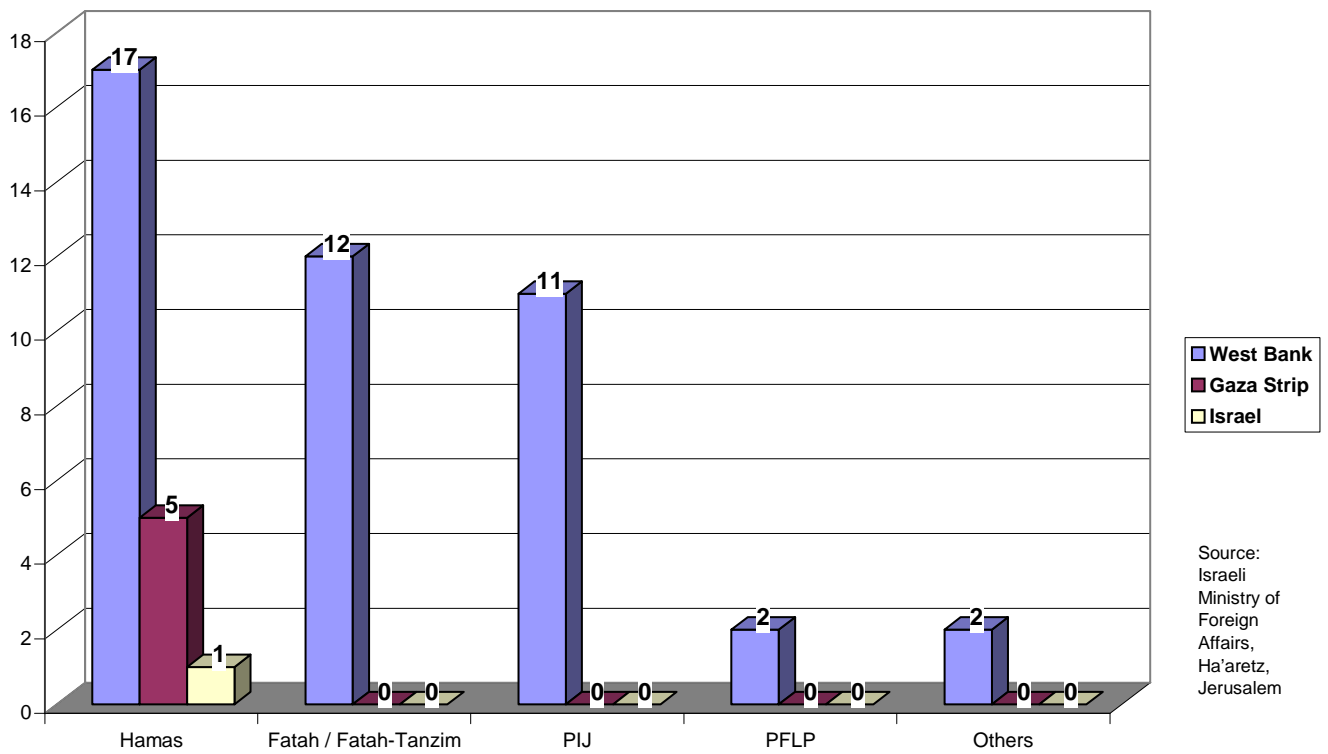
Fig. V: Number of Killed in Israel, Jerusalem, and WBGS by Organization - Time Series



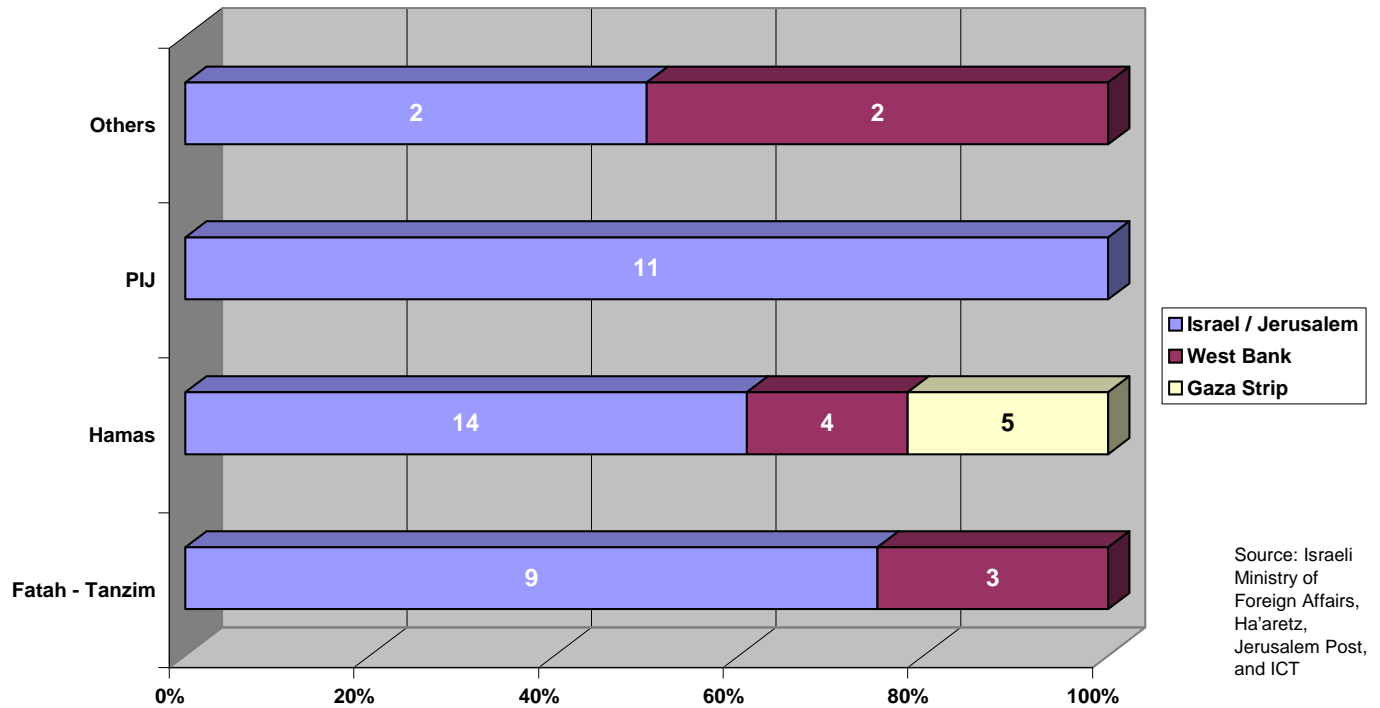
**Fig. VI: Target Type by Organization,
October 2000 - March 2002**



**Fig. VII: Origin of Attacker by Organization,
October 2000 - March 2002**



**Fig. VIII: Target Region by Organization,
October 2000 - March 2002**



**Fig. IX: Number of Suicide Attacks by Target Region,
October 2000 - March 2002**

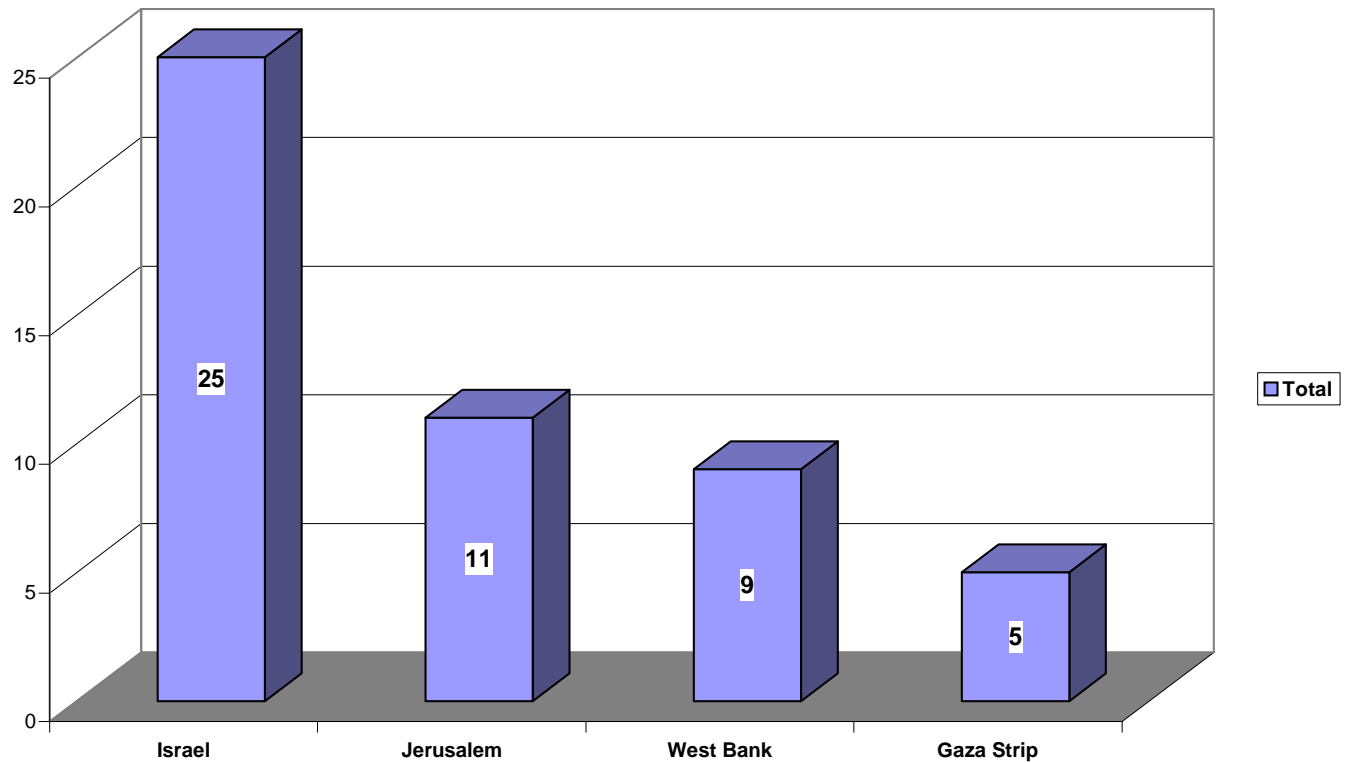
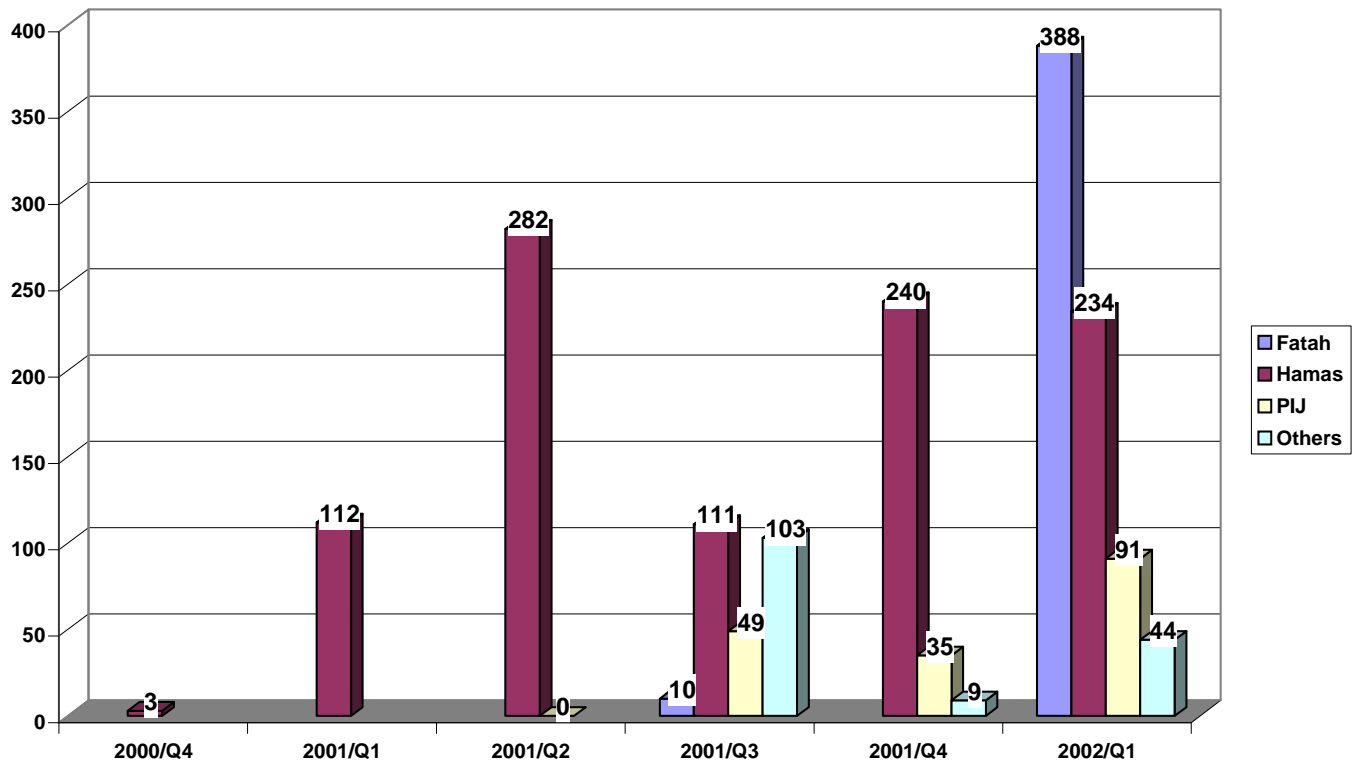
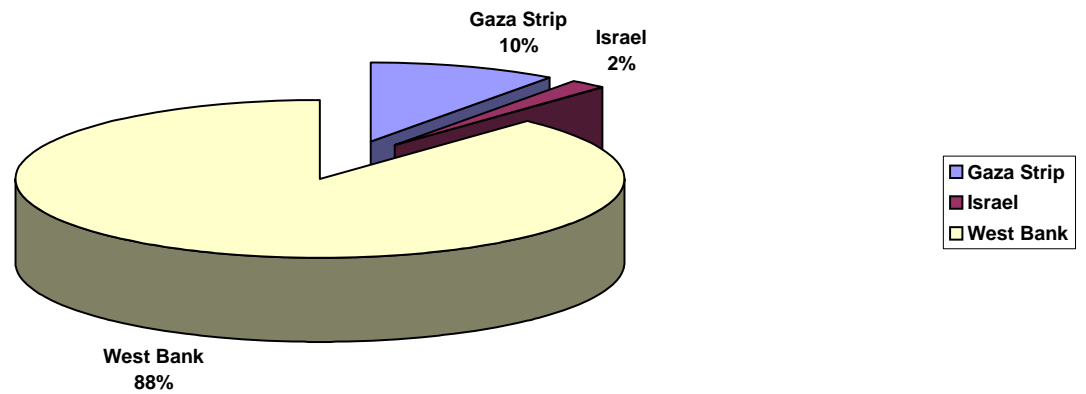


Fig. X: Number of Wounded in Israel, Jerusalem, and WBGS by Organization - Time Series

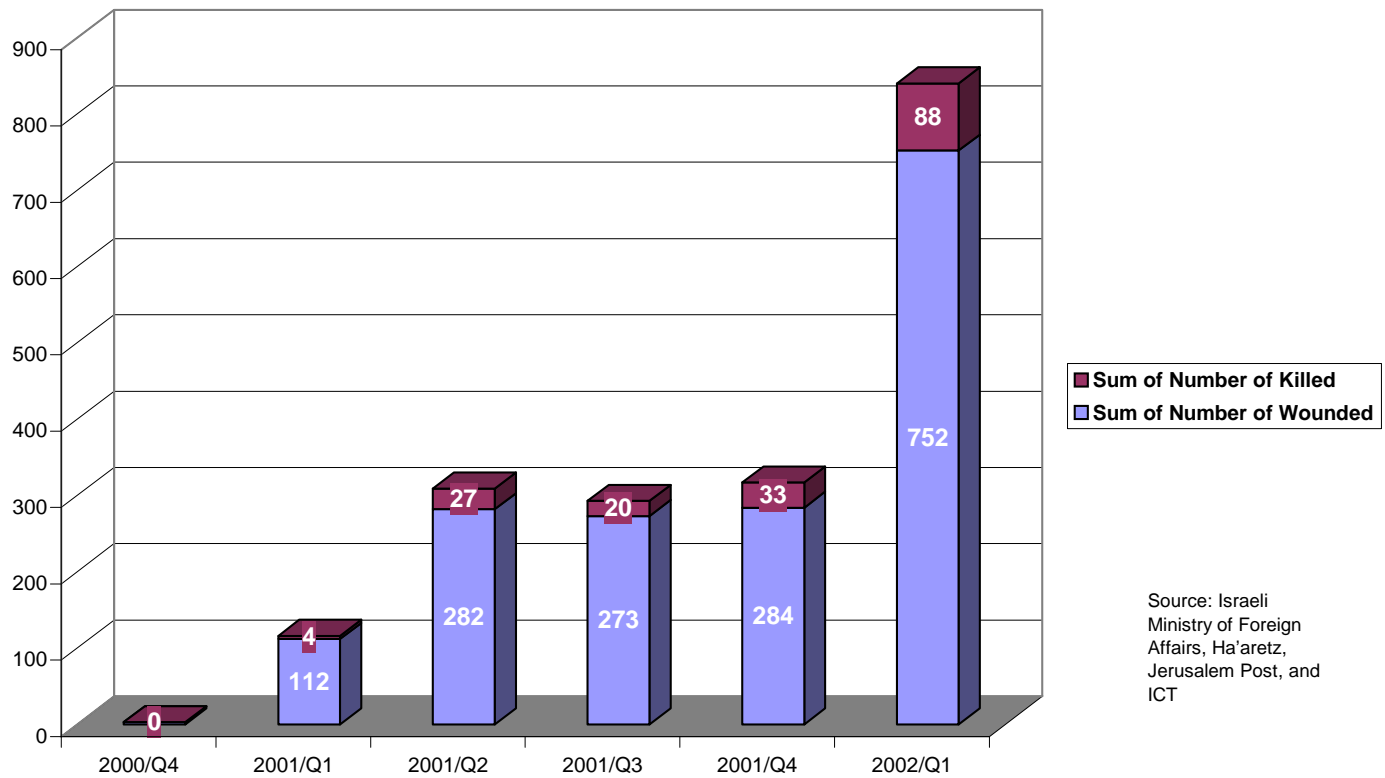


**Fig. XI: Origin of Attacker,
October 2000 - March 2002**



Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post, ICT

Fig. XII: Killed and Wounded in Israel, Jerusalem, and WBGS by Quarter



**Fig. XIII: Killed and Wounded by Region,
October 2000 - March 2002**

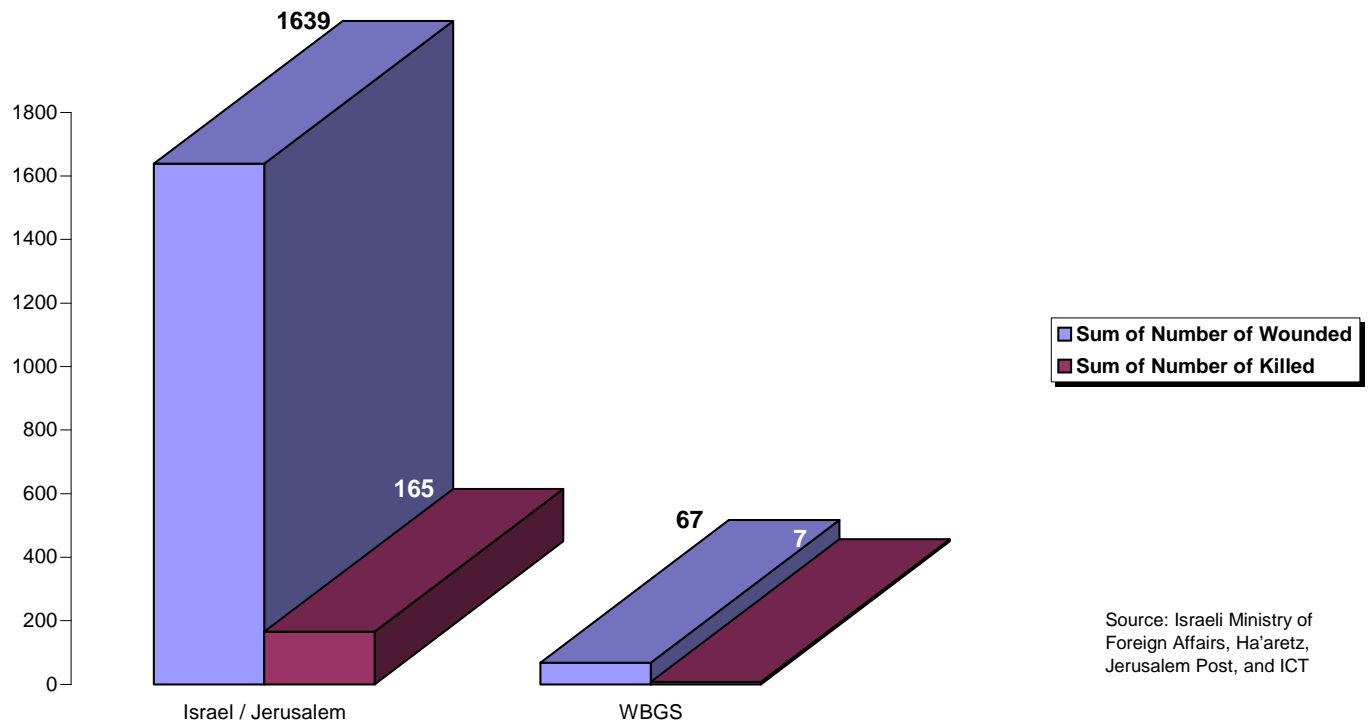
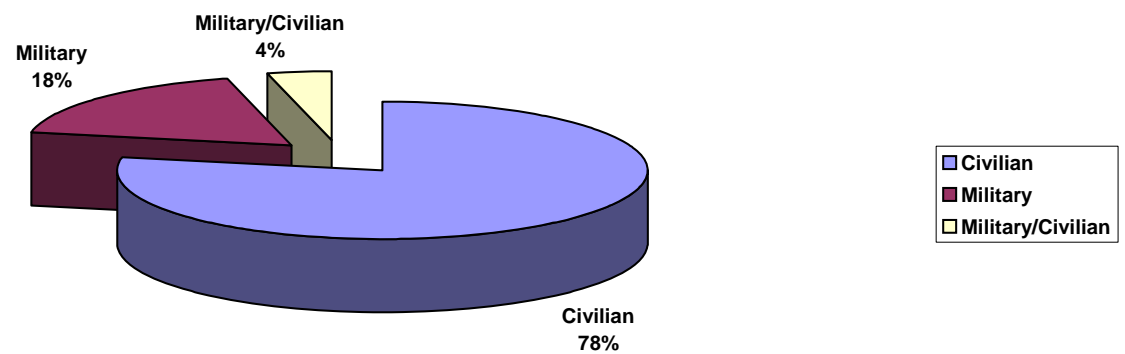
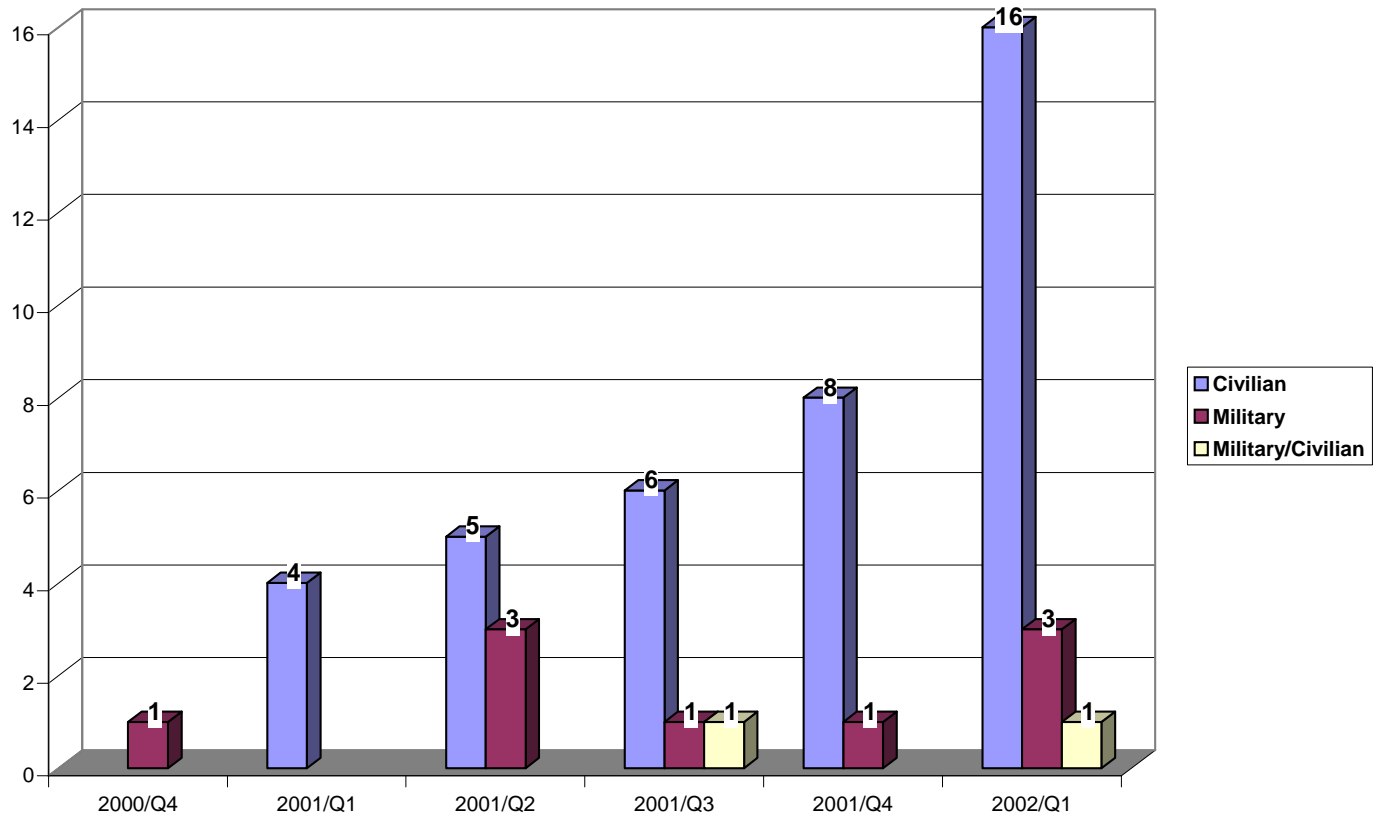


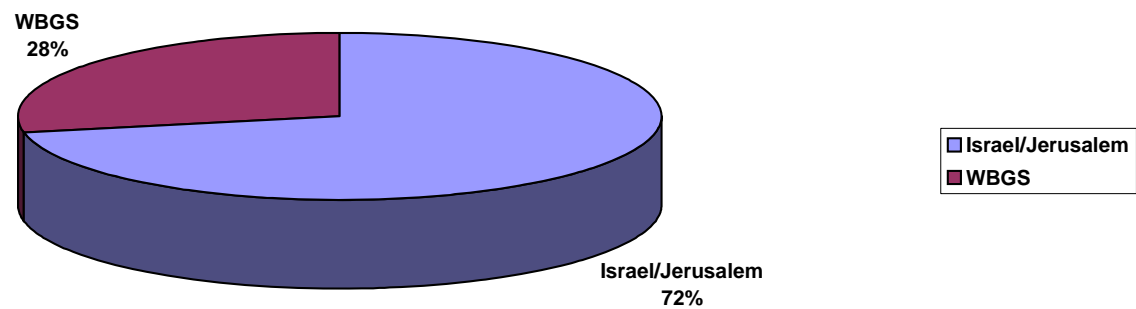
Fig. XIV: Suicide Attacks in Israel, Jerusalem, and WBGS by Target Type, October 2000 - March 2002



Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post, and ICT

Fig. XV: Target Type by Quarter

**Fig. XVI: Percentage of Suicide Attacks by Region,
October 2000 - March 2002**



Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post, and ICT

**Fig. XVII: Target Regions by Quarter,
October 2000 - March 2002**

